

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

March 9, 2021

The Honorable Thomas J. Vilsack
Secretary
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, D.C., 20250

Dear Secretary Vilsack,

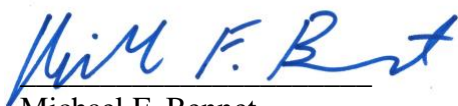
Congratulations on your confirmation to serve as the Secretary of Agriculture. We look forward to working with you to advance the United States Department of Agriculture's (USDA) mission. As you start this work, we write to highlight the importance of ongoing wildfire recovery efforts in Colorado and ask for your assistance in supporting this work.

Last summer, wildfires consumed over 10 million acres across the country, with almost 50 percent burning on National Forest Service land. In Colorado, we saw the three largest fires in state history and over 350,000 acres burned on federal land. The Cameron Peak Fire burned over 200,000 acres in four months, and in one day alone, the East Troublesome Fire grew more than 100,000 acres. In Colorado, the U.S. Forest Service has already identified approximately \$50 million in immediate needs, while Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) Emergency Watershed Protection (EWP) projects are also projected to cost over \$50 million.

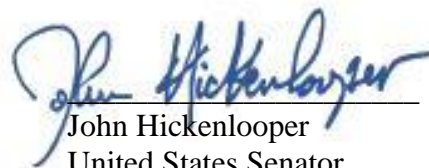
We encourage you to support wildfire recovery in Colorado and across the West. The NRCS EWP program and the Forest Service Burned Area Emergency Response (BAER) program are vital tools for short and long-term recovery. However, the effectiveness of these programs is sometimes limited due to administrative hurdles, local match requirements, staffing shortages, and inconsistent funding. Therefore, we encourage you to use USDA's broad discretion to maximize flexibilities as needed, and we stand ready to work with you in Congress to ensure that wildfire recovery programs have the funding and flexibility they need.

We appreciate your demonstrated commitment to our forests and watersheds and look forward to working with you in the months ahead to ensure that Colorado communities have a partner in the USDA as they recover from these devastating wildfires.

Sincerely,



Michael F. Bennet
United States Senator



John Hickenlooper
United States Senator