

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

November 30, 2012

The Honorable Daniel Inouye
Chairman
Senate Committee on Appropriations
The Capitol, S-128

The Honorable Thad Cochran
Ranking Member
Senate Committee on Appropriations
The Capitol, S-128

Dear Chairman Inouye and Ranking Member Cochran:

As you discuss the possibility for a supplemental appropriations measure before the conclusion of the 112th Congress, we write to urge you to consider including funding for the Department of Agriculture's Emergency Watershed Protection (EWP) program. The EWP is administered by the USDA's Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) and helps safeguard impaired watersheds and the drinking water infrastructure of affected communities, in particular for areas designated as major disasters under the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act. EWP will be critical to help Colorado communities recover from this year's unprecedented wildfire season.

As you know, a series of natural disasters have struck across the country over the past six months that cost American lives, caused extensive property damage, significantly disrupted daily life for millions of Americans, and triggered Stafford Act designations. In June and July, the Waldo Canyon and High Park wildfires in our state set records and displaced tens of thousands of Coloradans. In August, Hurricane Isaac caused flooding, power outages and forced evacuations in Florida, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama. Most recently, Hurricane Sandy affected states from Florida to Maine and caused unprecedented devastation in New York and New Jersey. EWP is one of the tools that can help all of these communities recover.

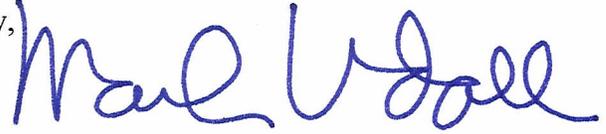
Although FEMA provides immediate emergency assistance when these disasters strike, it is important to remember that long term assistance such as EWP is also critical to recovery. Currently, a severe shortage of resources in EWP has left the wildfire-affected Colorado watersheds in a precarious position. For example, the watershed supplying municipal water to Fort Collins has a very high risk of water quality degradation, flood hazard, and road washouts. These hazards represent substantial risk to life and property. The limited EWP resources available have been used to mitigate these hazards to some extent, but the risks to life and property remain very high.

As Congress works through this lame duck session and you consider emergency supplemental funding for addressing natural disasters, we urge you to include robust funding for EWP to ensure the safety of people and property during natural disaster recovery.

Sincerely,

Handwritten signature of Michael F. Bennet in blue ink.

Michael F. Bennet
United States Senator

Handwritten signature of Mark Udall in blue ink.

Mark Udall
United States Senator