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March 13, 2020

The Honorable Sonny Perdue
Secretary of Agriculture
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, D.C. 20250

The Honorable David L. Bernhardt
Secretary of the Interior
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street, NW
Washington, D.C. 20240

Dear Secretaries Perdue and Bernhardt:

We write to request your immediate assistance to ensure that the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and the U.S. Department of the Interior (DOI) have the tools to work with rural counties and municipalities as they respond to Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19).

Rural communities are working to set up local emergency operation centers to help manage their response, but face challenges with limited staff capacity. On the western slope of Colorado, where four counties are currently experiencing outbreaks, some communities are already overwhelmed with the challenge.

Throughout rural America, DOI and USDA employ thousands of federal civil servants who have the relevant experience to assist with emergency response. For example, the U.S. Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management employ thousands of staff across the country who are Incident Command System qualified and have experience rapidly responding to forest fires, mobilizing critical resources, and managing information flow in times of crisis.

We believe these federal professionals are well suited to partner with rural counties and municipalities to enhance staff capacity and support communities challenged by this public health crisis. Therefore, in light of the Presidential emergency declaration, we urge you to interpret existing authorities broadly and take immediate steps to ensure USDA and DOI staff and resources are available and able to assist with emergency response to COVID-19 in Colorado and across the country.

Thank you for considering this request.

Sincerely,



Michael F. Bennet
United States Senator