



TINA KOTEK
GOVERNOR

March 4, 2025

The Honorable Doug Burgum
Secretary
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C St. NW
Washington, DC 20240

The Honorable Brooke Rollins
Secretary
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave. SW
Washington, DC 20250

The Honorable Chris Wright
Secretary
U.S. Department of Energy
1000 Independence Ave. SW
Washington, DC 20585

Dear Secretaries Burgum, Rollins and Wright,

I appreciated the time you took at the recent Governors convening to discuss issues and priorities common to Oregon and other western states. I wanted to follow up on that conversation to provide additional information about the issues I raised, as well as to seek your support for collaboration and coordination among your federal departments and agencies and the State of Oregon to address these issues.

Wildfire Risk

As you heard, the freezing of federal funding targeting wildfire prevention and suppression efforts in the West is top of mind for Oregon and nearly all Western state Governors. It is essential that the Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management continue providing federal funds for firefighting and suppression, as well as landscape treatments to reduce risk of catastrophic wildfires. In 2024, Oregon had one of its worst wildfire seasons, with over 1.9 million acres burned, over three times our 10-year average. Most of these acres were essential to the health and wellbeing of our ranching, agricultural, and forest industries. Infrastructure and transmission lines were damaged, causing massive interruptions and cutting off life-saving communication and power in our rural communities. Record-setting wildfire seasons across the west are getting longer, not shorter, and more devastating.

Staffing shortages at the Forest Service and BLM and a lack of federal funding pose a huge risk that can be mitigated, but now is when we must get ready for the upcoming fire season. The risks to public safety and state budgets are substantial. I request your partnership on the following:

1. Providing federal support to state and local governments to carry out their responsibilities to alleviate the damage, loss, hardship and suffering from wildfires.
2. Using scrutiny in federal workforce reductions particularly as it relates to wildfire suppression capacity.
3. Unlocking federal funding for wildfire mitigation efforts to aid in preventing catastrophic wildfire growth. These efforts reduce hazardous fuels and put rural Americans to work protecting our vulnerable communities and critical infrastructure.

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Secretaries Burgum, Rollins, and Wright
March 4, 2025
Page 2

BPA and Electric Grid Reliability

I want to highlight the challenges and on-the-ground impacts of federal workforce layoffs and shortages within the Department of Energy. We understand that approximately 15% to 20% of Bonneville Power Authority (BPA) staff were laid off or accepted the Administration's buyout offer. While thirty staff have been rehired, we understand that approximately 430 positions were cut. These positions were linemen, engineers, substation operators and power dispatchers, and multiple entities across the Pacific Northwest are raising real alarm about grid instability and power outages due to a shortage of staff who know how to manage grid events. As you know, BPA is a self-supporting entity. Ongoing workforce reductions by definition will not impact federal spending, but they do create instability for power availability and rates in the region. Utilities in Oregon are being clear with my staff that these reductions can have potentially devastating consequences for grid reliability and power availability.

Additionally, there is a critical joint transmission project planned as a partnership between BPA and a major western utility (Portland General Electric) that has been paused because BPA's authority to issue NEPA approvals and Categorical Exclusions has been rescinded. This across-the-board rescission impacts several BPA projects, with one of the most urgent being the Pearl-Sherwood project which was planned to have the NEPA signed and issued by February 21, 2025, in order to allow for construction to occur under carefully planned/coordinated outages. Projects like these typically have limited windows for construction, and this project in particular is critical to support new customer growth in the Northwest and to maintain reliability of power for industrial and residential customers. Immediate reinstatement of BPA's authority to issue NEPA and Categorical Exclusion approvals is needed for several projects to proceed on schedule. Any delay will impact critical scheduled facility outages necessary to perform work and, because of grid reliability, will not be able to be rescheduled for several months.

Hanford Reservation Nuclear Waste

Lastly, at the Hanford site, there is risk of irreversible radioactive contamination of not just the site but of the Columbia River itself if Hanford staffing cuts unintentionally result in lapse of existing protocols. Two dozen staff were reportedly released, including safety engineers. The significance of this threat of release of radioactive contaminants cannot be ignored or downplayed, yet it is a potential unintended consequence of recent actions impacting the management of the Hanford site.

Thank you for your time and commitment to solving problems for Americans. I look forward to continuing to work together to protect the health and safety of Oregonians.

Sincerely,



Governor Tina Kotek