

JOHNSON COUNTY COMMISSIONERS



William J. Novotny, III

Jeff Shelley

Steve Kozisek

January 29, 2025

The Honorable John Barrasso
Senate Majority Whip
307 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Cynthia Lummis
United States Senator
127A Russel Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Harriet Hageman
Member of Congress
1227 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Re: House Draw Fire Restoration and Reclamation Efforts

Dear Wyoming Congressional Delegation:

While we are delighted with the change in administration and the desire to bring more accountability to the authorization and appropriation of federal dollars, recent administrative action will have a devastating impact on the ranching families of Johnson County who are working to recover from the House Draw Fire. Presidential action for allocated dollars through the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) and the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) has clawed back recovery dollars committed to our shared constituents. These multigenerational ranch families need federal assistance, and they are now being denied help.

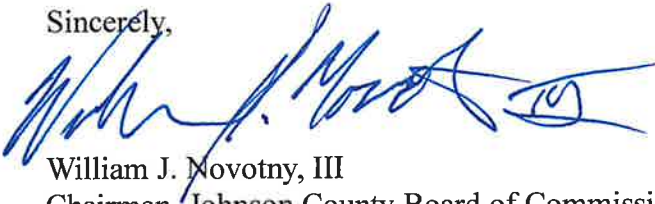
Eighteen Johnson County ranches have enrolled in grazing deferral programs with the United States Department of Agriculture's Natural Resource Conservation Service. They were slated to receive \$2 million in grazing deferral payments for 203,792 acres. Executive Orders signed after the Inauguration have eliminated that funding. Johnson County producers must defer grazing in the burn scar to allow their pastures to recover. Beyond the economic impact of the lost pasture income to these local producers, it is critical wildlife habitat for sage grouse, mule deer and antelope. Wildlife directly benefits from deferring grazing on portions of the charred landscape. Without federal assistance, many of these ranching families may not survive this natural disaster.

Additionally, the Johnson County Weed and Pest District is preparing a coordinated effort to aerially spray for invasive, noxious weeds within the burn scar. State and local funding sources, along with partnerships with our federal land management agencies were going to provide a tremendous opportunity to leverage resources and dollars to cover the most acreage. IRA and BIL funding through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP). More than \$750,000 was pledged to the aerial spraying cooperative effort. The weed and pest district were notified on Monday, January 27, 2025, that those funds have been rescinded and that they would have to find other funding for the project. The rug is literally being pulled out from under our efforts to recover from the House Draw Fire.

I write to you today asking for assistance to restore the federal funding to these critical projects. The ranchers of Johnson County desperately need your help. Living under continuing resolutions and the inability for Congress to reauthorize the Farm Bill or pass a federal budget is now directly drying up emergency assistance to the agricultural producers in my county. Please help me restore the grazing deferment payments and the aerial weed spraying funding.

Thank you for your service to the State of Wyoming and our nation. I may be reached at (307) 620-2642 or bnovotny@johnsoncowy.gov if you or your staff need additional information.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "William J. Novotny, III". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large, stylized initial "W" and "N".

William J. Novotny, III
Chairman, Johnson County Board of Commissioners