

February 13, 2024

The Honorable Ryan Zinke
United States House of Representatives
512 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515



Dear Congressman Zinke,

Since 1884, the Montana Stockgrowers Association (MSGA) has been dedicated to finding proactive solutions to the most difficult challenges facing Montana's ranching families. MSGA represents landowners who graze cattle on private, state, and federal lands in Montana. In recent years, one challenge that has continued to persist and create a significant financial burden to ranchers is the infestation of grasshoppers across the state.

To safeguard American agriculture and Montana natural resources, we are asking for an appropriation of \$3 - \$5 million dollars to be dedicated for USDA APHIS to treat acres in Montana for grasshopper suppression. Currently, there are no dollars dedicated to Montana for this effort leaving a significant financial burden on ranchers to determine if self-funding suppression on the land they manage is viable, which for many producers is not currently an option. While ranchers have managed to self-fund suppression in past years, the 2024 grasshopper forecast compounded by a multi-year drought, years of uninterrupted grasshopper infestations, and record high input costs make this year's situation feel insurmountable. Ranchers have already identified significant acres that may need to be treated and the need continues to grow.

In addition to drought over the course of the last few years, grasshoppers have annihilated acres upon acres of rangeland and cattle forage across Montana. While it is known that the grasshopper population is cyclical, 2024 will be the fourth consecutive year of extremely elevated grasshopper numbers. As an industry who has had to adapt and operate around natural events far outside our control, we can confidently say that the grasshopper infestation has devastated operations much like severe weather events. Each grasshopper consumes their body weight and destroys six times their body weight of vegetation daily. With a density of 15 or more grasshoppers per square yard, and in many places more, as projected by USDA APHIS, massive quantities of livestock forage are ruined each year and likely will be again this year.

The Rangeland Grasshopper Hazard forecast by USDA APHIS for 2024 projects that a significant portion of Montana will see a high density of adult grasshoppers throughout the season. This leaves cattle without feed and producers with higher costs of production as they will need to purchase feed from outside sources. This is a serious economic issue

likely leading to long-term effects across the industry. With a loss in forage comes a loss in weight gain, pregnancy retention, and overall cattle health. The grasshopper issue will hit all producers hard, but could be the tipping point for struggling operations or beginning producers. Across the state, ranchers have worked to combat the damage by engaging in USDA APHIS cost share program for aerial grasshopper treatment.

Our organization appreciates your attention to this matter and the work that has been done on behalf of Montana ranching families. We look forward to continuing to work with you on finding solutions to address the negative impacts grasshoppers are having on agriculture, local economies, and Montana natural resources.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Raylee A. Honeycutt". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a prominent loop at the end of the last name.

Raylee A. Honeycutt
Executive Vice President