

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

March 7, 2011

The Honorable Tom Vilsack
Secretary
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue
Washington, D.C. 20050

Dear Secretary Vilsack:

We write today to respectfully request that the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) continue to fund the essential Tri-State Predator Control Program of the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) Wildlife Services. Fifty percent of Montana's economy is tied to ranching and farming agriculture, particularly cattle and sheep production. Many Montanans rely on successful livestock production for their livelihoods, and predator management is vital to that success.

Montana is blessed with a beautiful landscape and abundant wildlife populations. Unfortunately, at times our wildlife populations can be one of the greatest threats to our livestock industry. The livestock protection programs of the USDA Wildlife Services have been imperative to managing those populations. In Montana alone, livestock losses account for several million dollars in lost revenue each year.

As you know, Congress recently passed a two week Continuing Resolution which will fund the government until March 18, 2011. The Continuing Resolution would eliminate funding to the Tri-State Predator Control Program. This program is vital to the state's management of predators, and the cut could not have come at a worse time for Montana's ranchers and farmers as calving and lambing season is currently in full swing.

The Tri-State Predator Control Program is an important funding partner with state and local governments and livestock producers in Montana, Idaho, and Wyoming. Loss of this funding is a serious setback to maintain the Wildlife Services program and the professional staff that work to protect livestock in the states. We fear that without adequately funding the support the existing livestock protection programs in Montana, predation management expertise will be lost and livestock grazing in some areas will be jeopardized.

In years past, the funds have been divided between the three states to aid their efforts in managing and controlling all predators. The funds have been especially helpful in assisting with the ever increasing costs and demands upon the states' Wildlife Services programs due to the exploding populations of federally introduced wolves in the states.

We understand the tough economic times across the country and the pressure all government agencies are facing as they try to trim their budgets. However, we strongly encourage your continued effort to keep strong funding for the livestock protection programs in Montana.

Thank you for your attention to these matters. We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

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Max Baucus
U.S. Senator

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jon Tester". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Jon Tester
U.S. Senator