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August 14, 2018

Senator Jon Tester  
United States Senator (D-MT)  
208 N Montana Ave # 202  
Helena, MT 59601

Re: FY 2019 appropriations requests

Dear Senator Tester:

As you know, I am the Policy Director for the Montana Wool Growers Association (MWGA). The MWGA represents Montana's sheep and wool producers.

You will recall from our meeting in Washington D.C. in March of this year, the Association has several federal legislative priorities relating to appropriations.

It is my understanding that the Senate will take up the balance of the FY '19 agriculture appropriation bills in September, after Labor Day. With this timing in mind, I write to reinforce two of Montana's sheep industry's federal funding priorities.

1. Small Ruminant line item within the USDA APHIS budget.

This line item is the sole source of funding for the National Scrapie Eradication Program, a top program priority for the domestic sheep industry. Scrapie has continued to cost the nation's sheep industry over \$20 million per year, and while we are close to our goal of being scrapie free, we must remain diligent in our commitment to the program.

A critical component of that program is identifying and ear tagging sheep and goats. Citing funding issues, APHIS decided in the last year to halt provision of plastic tags to producers at no charge.

For the sheep and goat industries, plastic tags are much preferred, which results in greater overall compliance. Metal ear tags if caught in comb and cutter of a shearing clipper, pose a tremendous danger to both the shearer and the sheep.

The industry has continued to disseminate educational materials to sheep producers nationwide on these dangers and best practices through the nationally recognized Sheep

Care Guide, but the solution is to offer the tags in both a metal and plastic option, or solely plastic.

As such, the membership of the Montana Wool Growers Association strongly supports an additional \$300,000 appropriation in the Fiscal Year 2019 appropriations for the APHIS small ruminant line item. Attendant to this request, we ask that report language be included in the appropriations bill that directs the agency to use all or part of those additional funds to make plastic tags available to sheep producers free of cost. This will ensure continued compliance with the mandatory program, while assuring safety for both shearers and the animals being shorn.

2. Adequate funding for USDA Wildlife Services to cover the cost of additional NEPA compliance mandates.

MWGA urges you to ensure Congress provides sufficient funding to the USDA Wildlife Services program. This program is a federal-producer partnership program, and a huge success story.

Wildlife Services personnel have a level of skill and knowledge in managing predator and endangered species that exceeds both other federal, as well as state, wildlife management agencies. Not only do livestock producers benefit from the animal damage management work performed by USDA Wildlife Services, so does the general public, particularly in the area of airport safety.

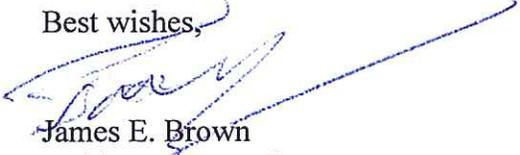
For the last few years, federal courts have been placing additional NEPA requirements on the agency – which such requirements are neither legally warranted or necessary. As a result of these court-imposed mandates, the Agency has had to allocate resources that would otherwise go to carrying out its mission, to meeting NEPA requirements.

Because the agency is losing ground as a result of having to meet court-ordered process requirements, MWGA believes Congress needs to make the agency whole fiscally. MWGA's membership supports \$106,776,000 for Wildlife Services in FY '19, which would be an increase to allow for recovery of the \$3.4 million incurred by the agency for NEPA compliance costs. MWGA's membership also support allocating \$19.7 million for Wildlife Services Methods Development.

Thank you for your time and consideration of these funding requests. Should you have questions, please feel free to have your agriculture staffer call me. I will assist in any way I can.

In addition, on behalf of the membership of the MWGA, I also extend an invitation for you to attend our 2018 annual state convention. The convention will be held at the Billings Hotel and Convention Center during the first weekend of December.

Best wishes,



James E. Brown  
*Public Relations Director*

cc: MWGA board