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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Press Release

\$500,000 available for emergency livestock feed to help producers impacted by 2015 wildfires

OLYMPIA – An Emergency Livestock Feed Program has been established to help Okanogan County livestock producers who lost hay and pasture in the recent wildfires. The Okanogan Conservation District is implementing the program with funding provided by the Washington State Conservation Commission (SCC) and Department of Ecology.

The idea originated from the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife's (WDFW) Wolf Advisory Group (WAG).

"I'm pleased the WAG took this initiative and we are able to make these funds available," said Representative Joel Kretz, R-Wauconda. "Some of our neighbor producers were hit hard in the fires and lost feed. They face a double hit with a tough winter coming on."

The program will support producers who were impacted by wildfires in 2015 with the purchase and transport of hay for their livestock. The funding comes in response to two wildfire seasons that burned more than 1,000 square miles in the county, including grazing areas. Funding is limited, so early applications will have a better chance of being funded.

Jack Field, Washington Cattlemen's Association Executive Vice President and a member of the WAG, said, "We are very appreciative and thankful for the efforts of the Legislators and Governor's Office to make this appropriation happen. This will be a big help to those who have been impacted by the fires."

Another WAG member, Shawn Cantrell of the Defenders of Wildlife, said, “It was important to the entire advisory group, including the conservation representatives, that we do something concrete in support of producers affected by the fires. Our vision for the future includes resilient rural communities alongside a sustained, recovered population of wolves.”

“We’ve been able to move quickly to use funding flexibly to meet the pressing needs of Okanogan producers,” added Representative Steve Tharinger, D-Dungeness, chair of the House Capital Budget Committee.

“The record-breaking wildfires this year caused extreme hardships for livestock producers in Okanogan County,” said SCC executive director, Mark Clark. “Hay and many acres of grazing lands were lost. By providing emergency funding to help purchase feed, we hope to help alleviate producers’ stress as they wait for pastures to recover.”

Donny Martorello, Wolf Policy Lead for WDFW, said the grant program “is a great example of what people can accomplish when they come together, and how state and local governments can support communities in need.”

“This appropriation will help to provide immediate relief to cattlemen and livestock producers that have been directly impacted by this past summer’s wildfires,” said Bill Sieverkropp, President of the Washington Cattlemen’s Association. Sieverkropp went on to say “the Washington Cattlemen’s Association would like to thank everyone who worked so hard to make this happen.”

Interested producers should visit the Okanogan Conservation District website (www.okanogand.org/fires) to find more information about program eligibility, guidelines, and the funding application. Applications are also available to pick up at Ag Technologies (249 Rodeo Trail, Okanogan) and the Okanogan Conservation District office (1251 S 2nd Ave #102, Okanogan). An Emergency Feed Advisory Committee will process applications, determine eligibility, and equitably distribute awards as funding allows.

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