Archuleta County, Colorado
Board of County Commissioners

398 Lewis Street / P. O. Box 1507
Pagosa Springs, Colorado 81147
970-264-8300

July 22, 2026

The Honorable Michael F. Bennet
United States Senate
261 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Re: Request for Federal Disaster Assistance for Colorado Communities Affected by the 2026 Wildfires

Dear Senator Bennet:

Archuleta County Commissioners respectfully asks you to work with Governor Jared Polis, Colorado's congressional delegation, the Federal Emergency Management Agency, the U.S. Small Business Administration, the U.S. Department of Agriculture, and the Administration to secure the strongest appropriate federal disaster assistance for Colorado communities affected by the 2026 wildfires. We urge support for one or more presidential major-disaster declarations covering every county and incident that satisfies federal criteria, rather than limiting the request to reimbursement of firefighting costs.

Southwest Colorado has been directly affected by the Ferris Fire in Dolores and Montezuma counties and by the Gold Mountain Fire in neighboring Ouray County. The Gold Mountain Fire has disrupted the U.S. Highway 550 tourism corridor and affected businesses and workers in Ouray County, San Juan County, and other nearby communities during the critical summer season. We are also deeply concerned for our neighbors elsewhere in Colorado who have suffered displacement, property loss, infrastructure damage, and economic harm from the Aspen Acres, Willow, and other significant fires.

We recognize that Fire Management Assistance Grants already authorized for certain fires are important, but those grants primarily support eligible fire-management and suppression costs. They do not by themselves address the full range of uninsured or underinsured household losses, public recovery costs, long-term mitigation needs, disaster-related unemployment, or the economic injury experienced by small businesses and nonprofit organizations.

We therefore ask you to advocate for a federal request and approval package that includes wherever the documented damage supports eligibility:

- **Individual Assistance** for designated counties with substantial damage to primary residences or serious unmet household needs, including housing assistance and support for uninsured or underinsured disaster-caused expenses;

- **Public Assistance** for eligible state, tribal, county, municipal, special-district, and nonprofit emergency costs, debris removal, and damaged public infrastructure;
- **Hazard Mitigation Grant Program funding** to reduce future wildfire, post-fire flooding, erosion, infrastructure, water-system, communications, and community-resilience risks;
- **Disaster Unemployment Assistance and related workforce support** where workers and self-employed residents have lost work because of the fires, evacuations, closures, or loss of access;
- **SBA physical-disaster and Economic Injury Disaster Loan availability** including an SBA disaster declaration if that can be obtained more quickly or cover economically affected counties that may not qualify for FEMA Individual Assistance;

- **USDA and land-management coordination** to expedite Livestock Forage Disaster Program certifications, other livestock and agricultural assistance, emergency financing, temporary grazing accommodations where feasible, and repair of damaged federal range improvements; and
- **Federal recovery coordination** including prompt joint preliminary damage assessments, disaster case management, crisis counseling, legal assistance, and clear guidance for communities and survivors on available programs and application deadlines.

We also ask that San Juan County and other communities experiencing documented business losses from the Gold Mountain Fire and related access disruptions be fully considered in any SBA economic-injury request, whether as primary or contiguous affected counties. Tourism-dependent mountain communities can sustain severe economic injury even when the fire does not cross their jurisdictional boundary or destroy a large number of structures.

Finally, please urge federal and state agencies to evaluate the cumulative burden of the 2026 wildfire season, including simultaneous demands on small rural governments, emergency services, housing, businesses, agriculture, and transportation corridors. Each program has its own eligibility requirements, but communities should not be excluded from assessment simply because their most serious losses are economic, agricultural, or related to public response rather than residential destruction.

Archuleta County appreciates your advocacy for Western and Southern Colorado. We respectfully request that you encourage Governor Polis to submit any necessary requests promptly, support their approval with FEMA and the Administration, pursue an SBA economic-injury declaration where appropriate, and help ensure that all qualifying affected counties receive access to the federal programs best suited to their losses.

Sincerely,

Warren Brown
Chairman