

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

July 14, 2025

The Honorable Doug Burgum  
U.S. Department of the Interior  
1849 C St. NW  
Washington, DC 20240

Dear Secretary Burgum:

We are writing to request information regarding the Department of the Interior's handling of the Dragon Bravo fire on the North Rim of the Grand Canyon. This fire has grown to 5,000 acres and has already destroyed between 50 and 80 structures. As the fire continues to burn, the people of Arizona deserve answers about federal decision making that may have impacted its spread.

As you may be aware, the Dragon Bravo fire was started by a lightning strike in Grand Canyon National Park on July 4<sup>th</sup> and is currently at 0% containment.<sup>1</sup> It has been reported that National Parks Service officials initially decided to monitor the fire as a controlled burn, but changed their approach as strong winds allowed the fire to jump multiple containment features.<sup>2</sup> According to the fire's InciWeb page, the fire is very active and is being driven by "hot temperatures, low relative humidity, and continued strong wind gusts."<sup>3</sup>

There are many questions over the initial decision to treat this fire as a controlled burn and subsequent decisions on how to respond. The North Rim has had weeks of extreme heat warnings, and is coming off of an extremely dry winter.<sup>4</sup> The National Wildland Fire Preparedness Level is currently at a four out of five, meaning that national resources are heavily committed and the Department must make choices about where to surge resources. We are concerned that treatment and response decisions may have affected the spread of fire in northern Arizona, and not for the first time: in 2001, the Warm Fire was initially treated as a managed burn north of the Grand Canyon, but strong gusts pushed the fire outside its boundaries and about 59,000 acres burned.<sup>5</sup> We cannot allow these decisions to damage thousands of acres in northern Arizona, risk the health and safety of residents, and destroy landmarks like the historic Grand Canyon Lodge, which was lost to the Dragon Bravo fire.

To further understand your Department's decision-making, we ask that you respond to the following questions by August 10<sup>th</sup>:

- Please provide an analysis of what factors went into the decision to treat this fire as a controlled burn. Were the recent heat trends and dryness of the area taken into account?

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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.azcentral.com/story/news/local/arizona-breaking/2025/07/13/hobbs-inquiry-north-rim-fire/85145940007/?taid=6874489d0d77a90001de77f9&utm\\_campaign=trueanthe&utm\\_medium=social&utm\\_source=twitter](https://www.azcentral.com/story/news/local/arizona-breaking/2025/07/13/hobbs-inquiry-north-rim-fire/85145940007/?taid=6874489d0d77a90001de77f9&utm_campaign=trueanthe&utm_medium=social&utm_source=twitter)

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.azcentral.com/story/news/local/arizona-wildfires/2025/07/13/white-sage-fire-dragon-bravo-fire-updates-grand-canyon/85074599007/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://inciweb.wildfire.gov/azgcp-dragon-bravo-fire>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.drought.gov/drought-status-updates/water-year-2025-snow-drought-current-conditions-summary-and-impacts-west>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.kjzz.org/2016-06-07/content-10328-arizona-warm-fire-10-years-later-cautionary-tale>

- Given the history of challenges with controlled burns in Northern Arizona, how does the Department plan to avoid similar fire spread in the future?
- How does the Department plan to track wildfire decision-making throughout the Administration's consolidation of the wildland fire workforce with the U.S. Forest Service?
- What resources has the Department surged to respond to the fire since it escaped containment? Were the resources available and stationed at the North Rim, or were they stationed elsewhere? Are there resources needed that are not currently available?

As discussed during your confirmation process, the Grand Canyon is Arizona's crown jewel. The Dragon Bravo fire has already devastated this natural and cultural treasure, and the fire continues to spread. As the Department of Interior is poised to take on even more wildfire response responsibility under President Trump's wildfire consolidation executive order, our constituents deserve to know that the best wildfire response decisions are being made. Answers to the questions posed above will be helpful in determining whether or not that is the case.

Thank you for your attention to this request, and your commitment to ensuring that our nation's wildfire response practices protect the life and safety of all Americans.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ruben Gallego". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name and last name clearly distinguishable.

Ruben Gallego  
U.S. Senator

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Mark Kelly". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name and last name clearly distinguishable.

Mark Kelly  
U.S. Senator