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(S.D.)-Speedy Claims Sought For Fire-Stricken Ranchers



By: Roxie Graham-Marski Posted at: 04/10/2013 07:30 AM

BISMARCK, N.D. (AP) - North Dakota's U.S. senators are pressing the U.S. Forest Service to make speedy payments to landowners affected by a grassland fire on the Dakotas border.

The Pautre Fire in southwestern North Dakota and northwestern South Dakota late last week began as a 130-acre controlled burn on the Grand River National Grasslands. It escaped containment due to strong winds and blackened nearly 16 square miles.

The Forest Service says it intends to compensate landowners for damages. Sens. John Hoeven and Heidi Heitkamp are pushing the agency to expedite the process. Hoeven says the agency has agreed to streamline the claims process.

Some ranchers say they can't afford to pay now and be reimbursed later. Grand River Grazing Association head Tim Smith tells The Bismarck Tribune that damages will exceed \$1.5 million.