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(Neb.)-Relief Fund Established For Area Ranchers

By: Chris Fankhauser Posted at: 10/10/2013 02:12 PM

(Chadron)-The far reaching impact of the unusually early and powerful snowstorm last weekend in Nebraska's northern Panhandle and neighboring South Dakota is still being assessed. State, county and local officials and residents are stepping up to offer support.

District 43 State Senator Al Davis expressed his personal appreciation to Lieutenant Governor Levon Heidemann and Al Berndt, assistant director of the Nebraska Emergency Management Agency, for their visit Tuesday to survey the storm damaged area.

Heavy, wet snow and high winds downed countless trees and power lines, and caused damage to buildings and vehicles. For cattle this was a particularly deadly storm. Yesterday (Wednesday) Davis met with Chadron and Dawes County officials to learn more about the blizzard and livestock losses. Davis said things here are far worse than he anticipated in terms of deaths among cattle. He stated that livestock losses on the plains of Nebraska, South Dakota and Wyoming have been estimated to be between 60,000 and 100,000 head.

He believes there are also animals that will sicken and die as time goes on which will add to these numbers. The effects of these losses will be felt for years. The storm took calves and cows that would have delivered calves next year. According to Davis, some cows managed to survive the storm by eating pine needles because grass was covered, which will cause them to abort the calves they are carrying in the next few weeks.

Agricultural losses will affect the entire region's economy that was also hard hit by wildfires last year. Ranchers are struggling with immediate economic and emotional pain and will soon face the challenge of disposal of carcasses. At this time the federal government is ill equipped to offer immediate assistance, so it will be especially important for ranchers to carefully document their losses. If good records are not kept eligibility for indemnity funds will be jeopardized should such funds become available.

A relief fund has been set up at the Chadron Community Foundation. Donations can be sent to the Cattlemen Relief Fund, PO Box 1125, Chadron, NE 69337.

Individuals needed mental health support services to help them cope with the aftermath of this natural disaster should contact the State of Nebraska's Behavioral Health Region I office in Scottsbluff at 308-635-3173, Crossroads Resources in Chadron at 308-432-3920, or Western Community Health Resources in Chadron at 308-432-8979 or Crawford at 308-665-1770.

(Story courtesy Senator Davis' office)