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## **Gov. Heineman Approves Release of Roadside Haying in Nebraska**

(Lincoln, Neb.) Gov. Dave Heineman today ordered the release of roadside rights-of-way statewide to haying in response to ongoing drought conditions. The Governor also declared a state of emergency in Nebraska to prepare for the possibility of grassland fires.

Roadside haying will occur in two stages to balance the immediate need for grazing forage while protecting wildlife habitat at an important time for birds. All rights-of-way in counties west of U.S. 281, which runs through Grand Island, will open to emergency haying tomorrow, June 20. Counties east of U.S. 281 will open to haying on Monday, June 26.

The decision to open roadside haying comes in response to the rapid deterioration of forage in the central and western parts of the state. Despite recent rains, all of Nebraska remains at precipitation levels below normal.

"We hope that producers in eastern Nebraska might consider helping their fellow producers in western Nebraska when the time arrives, because the culling of herds can have a devastating effect on main street economies across the entire state," Gov. Heineman said. "Our intention with the release of emergency haying is to ensure that we can bring every available resource to bear for the benefit of Nebraska's livestock producers."

The Governor made the announcement following a meeting of the Drought Management Team, where he asked the Nebraska Department of Agriculture (NDA) and the Nebraska Department of Roads (NDR) to coordinate haying efforts with the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission. Roadside haying was last authorized in 2002.

Hay from rights-of-way will be available only to adjacent landowners for the first five working days following county openings to roadside haying. Participants will be required to apply for a permit at a NDR sales offices. A list of hay permit sales office locations is available on the NDR Web site at <http://www.nebraskatransportation.org/news/drought/index.htm>.

Unclaimed roadside forage will be made available to all producers on a first-come, first-served basis after the five-day wait. An individual may purchase from one to five miles of roadside on one or both sides. Interstate 80 ditches will be open for permitting. Hay is for private use only, and only one permit is allowed per family.

Wherever possible, the Governor asked that producers consider delaying harvesting the roadside forage until July 1, in order to give nesting pheasants more time to mature.

"I encourage those interested in applying for permits to consider the needs of those experiencing the greatest hardship in our state," Gov. Heineman said. "Those in the extreme drought or D3 category on the U.S. Drought Monitor stand to benefit the most from the early release of haying. I'd also urge travelers to use caution as haying begins on state and local roadways over the course of the next two weeks."

The Nebraska Hay & Forage Hotline is also available to assist farmers and ranchers in locating available forage materials. The free service, sponsored by NDA, helps connect buyers with sellers of hay, pasture

and other types of forage. Ethanol producers and others with available grains and feed material are encouraged to contact the hotline.

A link to additional information about the Hay Hotline is available on the front portal of the state Web site, <http://www.Nebraska.gov>, or by calling (800) 422-6692. Buyers are responsible for contacting sellers to negotiate transactions.

The state-level emergency declaration enables resources of the Nebraska National Guard for rapid response to anticipated disasters, including the grass fires.

In addition to authorizing statewide roadside haying and declaring a state of emergency, the Governor announced that he would be sharing the report from the most recent Climate Assessment Response Committee meeting with Nebraska's congressional delegation, and will urge leaders to press for additional federal aid aimed at drought-relief.

"I want to applaud our Senators for introducing legislation that would provide much-needed assistance for Nebraska producers. I hope Congress will take these concerns to heart and act quickly to approve funding for additional drought mitigation efforts."

The Governor also directed NDA officials to coordinate with University of Nebraska economists in determining the possible economic impact of this year's drought. Estimates in previous years have found agricultural losses of more than \$1 billion.

The latest information on drought conditions and assistance programs is available online at <http://www.droughtcentral.org>.

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