

COLORADO FOREST AND WATER ALLIANCE
Box 165, Florissant, CO 80816

July 1, 2020

The Honorable James Hubbard, Undersecretary of Agriculture
United States Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave, SW
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Undersecretary Hubbard:

Our organization, the Colorado Forest and Water Alliance (COFWA), was formed to advocate for policies and actions that create resilient forests and watersheds here in Colorado. But we know our efforts in Colorado reach far beyond our borders: Colorado's major rivers provide life sustaining water to numerous downstream states, not only benefitting millions of people, but also their agriculture, outdoor recreation economies, and fish and wildlife populations.

Over two decades ago, forestry and water leaders in Colorado recognized that restoring forests and watersheds helps to protect water supplies and water quality. We believe our track record of success in Forest-Water leadership and innovation is a compelling example for other states to follow. COFWA celebrates success stories from across the state, which this short list exemplifies:

- Creation of over 70 forest and watershed collaboratives across Colorado, beginning as early as 1987;
- Implementation of Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program (CFLRP) projects on the Front Range and the Uncompahgre Plateau, which have implemented forest-restoration projects on over 48,000 acres, and 41,000 acres of prescribed fire, since 2009;
- Creation of state and local tax and financing options, such as development of the state's Wildfire Risk Reduction Grant program, which has allocated over \$14 million dollars to a matching-grant program since 2013, and Summit County's Wildfire Prevention tax, a voter-approved property tax that provides \$1 million per year toward wildfire prevention initiatives;
- Implementation of the Forests to Faucets program of work, through which municipal water providers invest millions of dollars each year in partnership with federal land managers to mitigate wildfire risks around critical source water supply areas;

The members of the Colorado Forest & Water Alliance (COFWA) have joined together for mutual assistance in advocating at state and federal levels about policies, funding, and programs that support meaningful and measurable improvements in forest health and watershed resiliency benefiting Colorado.

Colorado Forest & Water Alliance Members: Colorado Water Congress, Colorado Timber Industry, Club 20, and the Watershed Health Investment Partners

- Creation of Good Neighbor Authority—in which cross-boundary work can be completed on both federal and adjacent non-federal lands. This program was piloted in Colorado in 2000, and expanded in the 2018 Farm Bill to cover the entire country;
- Implementation of Colorado’s Water Plan, which includes a strong focus on the nexus of water and forests, and emphasizes watershed health as a critical strategy for protecting Colorado’s water supply future.

Recognizing water as a principle value to be protected is one of the unique features of the Colorado/USDA Shared Stewardship agreement that you and Governor Polis signed late last year. We recognize that the traditional USFS line item funding, and funding Region by Region, was never envisioned to address specifically the forest challenges that affect our headwater basins. Thus, we write today to request your continued support for funding programs that create the means for Colorado to continue our legacy of leadership in collaborative restoration efforts. Proven programs such as the Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program have helped incentivize highly successful partnerships with multiple stakeholders. The first-of-its-kind Forests to Faucets program needs continued federal funding to maintain a direct match from water providers – thereby doubling the funding and capacity to treat critical acres. There is also a new program, part of the 2018 Farm Bill titled the Water Source Protection Program (WSPP), that is tailor-made for Colorado given our role as the pre-eminent headwaters state in the western United States. A recent letter from Senators Bennet and Wyden supporting appropriations for this program demonstrates Congressional intent to accelerate watershed restoration efforts in Colorado and across the West to protect our valuable water supplies.

We know these are very challenging times. COVID-19 will certainly continue to affect available Federal funds and programs. We also know that the wildfire threat to our forests, watersheds, and water supply infrastructure is only increasing – and time is not our friend. We respectfully urge you to consider Colorado’s proven track record with collaboration, substantial matching funds from water providers, cross-boundary projects, and the full support of our political leadership, when you make decisions on where best to invest the limited federal funds available to improve forest conditions. COFWA believes Colorado has proven to be one of the best investments for USDA/USFS funds and programs anywhere in the country.

Thank you for your consideration and we are available to answer any questions either via letter or preferably via video conferencing. Finally, we appreciate all that you are doing promoting collaborative approaches to address the forest and watershed challenges we face today and in the future.

Respectfully,

/s/

Colorado Forest and Water Alliance:

Colorado Water Congress (Representative, Travis Smith, Doug Kemper)

Colorado Timber Industry Association (Representative, Molly Pitts)

Club 20 (Representatives Nancy Fishering, Cindy Dozier, Chris Treese)

Watershed Health Investment Partners (Representatives Mark Shea, Mike McHugh)

Cc: Chief Vicki Christiansen

Cc: Deputy Chief Chris French

Cc: Acting Regional Forester Jennifer Eberlien