

## Forest Health Advisory Council

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Water Resources Review Committee  
October 5, 2017  
RE: Forest Health Advisory Council Priorities

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Dear Members of the Water Resources Review Committee,

The Forest Health Advisory Council (FHAC) recognizes that forest health and watershed health are directly related to water quality and quantity. Water quality, snowpack and snowmelt, and timing of water release are negatively affected by poor forest health. The FHAC endorses many elements of the Colorado Water Plan. Please allow for us to share with you the problem statement that the FHAC has formulated below.

**FHAC Problem Statement:** As a result of changes in fire frequency and intensity, change in social values, recent drought and insects/disease, as well as lack of active management, Colorado's forests are facing unprecedented challenges. Critical human values such as clean water and wildlife resources, recreation opportunities, and forested communities around the state are in jeopardy due to high-severity fire, insect infestations, and other transitional disturbances.

In order to address the problem statement above, the FHAC has identified the following priorities:

Regional Approach to Forest Health Management: As referenced in both the Colorado Water Plan and the Synthesis Report to the Colorado Water Plan (recently prepared by the Colorado State Forest Service and the Colorado Water Conservation Board), partnerships with local collaborative groups that promote forest health are essential to ensuring that projects are being properly planned and completed at the watershed level. The FHAC is actively promoting this regional approach to Forest Health Projects being implemented on the ground through working directly with the Basin Roundtables and the wide range of local partners associated with the Basin Roundtables. The FHAC is working at compiling a comprehensive list of these partners and assessing how to best work together to further forest health in Colorado.

Expand Local Funding to Promote Forest Health: The FHAC promotes the need to incentivize and fund forest management activities at the watershed level that are necessary to alter landscape-level forest health in valuable headwaters of Colorado. The 2017 Colorado Water Conservation Board (CWCB) Projects Bill allocated \$10 million from the severance tax perpetual base fund to the implementation of the Colorado Water Plan. In the 2018 CWCB Projects bill, the FHAC would like to propose a robust expansion of funds for this line item, as to include additional funding for forest health projects. The FHAC is seeking to expand upon the Environmental & Recreation Projects portion of Colorado Water Plan Grant Programs, and also promotes having a stand-alone category for Forest Health Projects.

Governmental Immunity for CSFS to Conduct Prescribed Burns: The FHAC supports the use of prescribed fire as a matter of risk management when compared to wildfire and recognizes that certain CSFS personnel have unique qualifications and experience relating to wildfire management that are not currently being utilized, particularly with regard to pile burns. The FHAC is currently discussing the merits of governmental immunity for State and local agencies to facilitate the use of prescribed fire to conduct prescribed burns on State and private lands.

Proactive Forest Management: The FHAC supports an increase in and shift of funding to active management in an attempt to decrease suppression costs. The State of Colorado spent \$9.3 million to

suppress the Black Forest Fire of 2013, with insurance losses exceeding \$420.5 million. Completing management treatments and projects before a wildfire occurs can directly reduce suppression efforts, reduce the amount of negative post-fire effects, and promote firefighter safety.

Timber Industry in Colorado: The FHAC encourages agencies to prioritize creating a consistent, long-term timber harvesting program across the state. The cost of biomass removal or utilization per acre is very high due to lack of wood products businesses, particularly in Colorado's rural areas. The FHAC supports utilizing and incentivizing the timber industry as part of the solution to decreasing the cost of treatment. A more robust timber industry creates additional jobs in rural communities and provides critical funding necessary to reduce the costs of fuel mitigation and forest treatments.

Sincerely,

Members of the Forest Health Advisory Council

Norm Birtcher  
J. Paul Brown  
Carol Ekarius  
Cindy Farney  
Dan Gibbs  
Neilie Goodwin  
John Hall  
Michael Preston

Scott Jones  
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