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**STATE OF COLORADO FOREST HEALTH BRIEFING BEFORE THE JOINT COMMITTEE ON
AGRICULTURE AND NATURAL RESOURCES
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE – FOREST SERVICE
ROCKY MOUNTAIN REGION
JACQUE BUCHANAN, DEPUTY REGIONAL FORESTER**

Chairman Sonnenberg (Sen. Jerry Sonnenberg), Chairwoman Arndt (Rep. Jeni Arndt) and Members of the Committees:

Good morning, I am Jacqueline Buchanan, Deputy Regional Forester for the Rocky Mountain Region of the United States Forest Service. I am representing Regional Forester Brian Ferebee today.

Thank you for the opportunity to come before the Colorado Senate Agriculture, Natural Resources and Energy; and House Agriculture, Livestock and Natural Resources Committees.

In Colorado, the Rocky Mountain Region has the honor of overseeing seven National Forests and two National Grasslands. These lands are central to the identity and prosperity of the State of Colorado. I am honored to have the multi-use land management responsibilities in Colorado and surrounding states. I appreciate the close working relationships we have with you and your constituents.

I would also like to thank the Colorado State Forester, Mike Lester, and his staff for the productive nature of our partnerships.

Together with the State Forest Service, the wood products industry, and our many partners, we are doing tremendous work in Colorado to sustain our nation's forests and grasslands.

- Our National forests and grasslands provide many benefits to communities throughout the State of Colorado, including hunting, fishing, hiking, skiing, camping, clean water, timber products, grazing, and minerals, all of which support jobs and economic activity. The economic direct and indirect impact from national forests is substantial.

Local communities have a key role in sustaining the national forests and grasslands. We know this to be true not just as a theory, our employees live and

work in cities and towns all across this great state. We are Coloradans: The U.S. Forest Service is your neighbor and partner. We are privileged to work with and alongside you to maintain the state's scenic backdrops and our natural resources.

Colorado's national forests and grasslands are providing good jobs and contribute significantly to small towns and rural counties. In many places, these public lands are a main economic driver for the community and they provide the foundation for recreation and tourism throughout Colorado.

For example, the Colorado State Forest Service is an excellent partner in developing and establishing a Good Neighbor Agreement program and implementation of Good Neighbor projects throughout the state of Colorado. This authority allows us, working together, to accomplish critical work across landownership boundaries, on federal, state, and private lands.

This past year, we created a steering committee with members from the Grand Mesa Uncompahgre and Gunnison National Forests (aka the GMUG) and the Gunnison, Montrose and Grand Junction State Forest Service Field Offices. This committee is supporting the very active Good Neighbor program on the GMUG, and the work they are doing will be used to facilitate Good Neighbor projects throughout Colorado.

In 2017, using a Colorado State Forest Service Contract, the Little Cone Timber Sale sold 1,766 CCF of timber from the GMUG National Forest. Logging will begin in 2018. This project would not be possible without the State as our partner.

Also on the GMUG National Forest, there are three large Good Neighbor Supplemental Project Agreements that span the Forest. The agreements are great examples of sharing federal and state resources to deliver goods and services from National Forest lands. The agreements provide \$750,000 in funds, allowing the Colorado State Forest Service to hire foresters to work on Good Neighbor projects. So far, two Colorado State foresters were hired and are working on timber sales that will be offered in 2018. Also, a state wide agreement, signed in 2017, provides \$300,000 over the next five years to support additional Good Neighbor field forester staff.

Two other Supplemental Project Agreements have been established on the San Juan National Forest. One is a large project where the US Forest Service allocated \$982,000 for a fuel reduction treatment project. The project was prepared and administered by Colorado State Forest Service personnel. The other project is a

42-acre fuel reduction treatment (Shalona) funded at \$29,000 from US Forest Service funds.

The Arapaho-Roosevelt National Forest is in the process of developing three Supplemental Project Agreements that will cover the entire forest. Field preparation on a multiple ownership, 70-acre timber sale (Snow Mountain) is currently underway. A Colorado State timber sale contract for this treatment is expected to be awarded in 2018.

A Good Neighbor Agreement on the Rio Grande National Forest allows Colorado State Forest Service personnel to sell and administer small cutting permits that would not otherwise be possible without the added capacity of our state partners. These sales fill an important role in the local rural economy by providing diversity and opportunity for small operators.

The Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program, also called CFLRP, is another tool that connects the Forest Service with local groups, state and local government, and non-profit organizations. Working together, we are able to accomplish vegetation management projects leading to more resilient landscapes – projects such as road maintenance, mechanical treatment of vegetation, reforestation in wildfire burn areas, treatment of invasive species, trail rehabilitation, and wildlife habitat improvements. Through CFLRP and other partnerships, we have treated thousands of acres across the Front Range since 2010.

I am pleased to tell you that the majority of the planned treatments for the ten-year period of the CFLRP are on trajectory to meet, or have already exceeded, the expected outputs.

One of the unique aspects of CFLRP is the environmental monitoring component that helps us understand how we are improving forest conditions and what we may need to adjust. For example, in 2017, the US Forest Service provided funding to Colorado Parks and Wildlife to support an elk health and habitat study on the GMUG National Forest.

This kind of monitoring is important because we recognize that our forests need careful management more than ever in the face of wildfire, insects and diseases and other forces that threaten their future sustainability.

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The National Forests and Grasslands will continue to play a central role in providing resources and recreation opportunities for Coloradans into the future and we are adapting our management to reflect this increasing demand.

To respond to these changes, we are modernizing program delivery processes. This modernization process is important to me: I am taking it on as a priority. As such, I am part of the guiding team assisting the Agency in identifying ways to improve the policies, authorities, practices, and tools that we use to produce forest products. I am pleased to tell you that we are working on several short-term actions and intend to develop a long-term strategy in 2018.

Let me share with you one example of efficiency improvement:

For many years Forest Supervisors, timber managers and our ski industry partners have been requesting a more streamlined, flexible and efficient way to allow wood product removal from National Forest lands within ski area special use permits.

This year, we analyzed and developed recommendations for a streamlined and flexible method of wood product removal for ski area projects, and for routine maintenance. Guidance was sent to all forests in the Rocky Mountain Region allowing for flexibility and efficiencies to add and remove wood products within a timber contract without penalty or extra administrative work and simplifying the measurement and designation of timber.

We further simplified the process by using a "designation by description" option in timber contracts – this means, that contractors can cut trees to match a predetermined outcome on the landscape rather than having to work solely from specified tree sizes.

These streamlines allow project and maintenance work on ski areas to be accomplished with greater flexibility and ease. This frees up scarce agency resources to focus on other critical forest treatments, and allows for more flexibility and responsiveness by our ski area partners.

While we make these process improvements, we are using the tools we have to improve forest conditions and protect communities by continuing the significant upward trend of vegetation treatment acres in the State.

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Timber harvest is an important tool for forest restoration, and it is an industry we value. Timber sales provide a variety of positive economic benefits, including jobs to local communities.

In 2017, approximately 142,300 MBF of timber was harvested from National Forests in Colorado. 70% of the volume removed was saw timber- enough to frame 6,225 average size houses.

The Forest Service invested over \$14 million dollars in vegetation treatment projects targeting wood product removal efforts in Colorado, continuing to emphasize salvaging beetle killed material which makes up the majority of the volume being removed.

We recognize that our timber industry partners are key in helping to create resilient landscapes. Biochar Now is a biochar plant near Loveland that plans to expand in 2018. The Trinchera Blanca Ranch in southern Colorado opened a saw mill to take wood from the ranch but now expects to take material from National Forest lands in the area.

There is a misconception that the Forest Service isn't doing much vegetation management in Colorado. This is simply not true. The region has significantly increased spending on vegetation management projects of all kinds in Colorado. In fiscal year 2013, we spent just under 29 million. In fiscal year 2017, we spent 41 ½ million dollars on vegetation management projects in Colorado. Over the past five fiscal years, the Forest Service has spent over 161 ½ million dollars on vegetation management projects in Colorado.

We have been meeting or exceeding our regional timber targets over the past several years, and we consistently exceed assigned fuels accomplishments. We have increased the focus of broadcast burning in Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) in Colorado, contributing to the creation of fire adapted communities.

Overall, in FY17, the National Forests of Colorado accomplished over 63,000 acres of fuels mitigation and restoration treatments aimed at mitigating the effects from wildfire and improving watershed health. Over 25,000 acres of those treatments occurred in the Wildland Urban Interface (WUI).

Approximately 21,000 acres of the fuels accomplishments came from the management of wildfires where the beneficial effects of naturally ignited wildfire was recognized as moving landscapes toward desired future conditions.

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Supplemental funding was also provided to the National Forests of Colorado where local, state and other federal partnerships contributed to multi-jurisdictional landscape treatments. Approximately \$2.6 million was awarded through a competitive process at the national level to five National Forests in Colorado to fund seven fuels reduction projects.

In addition, the US Forest Service provided over \$658,000 in Land Assistance to the State of Colorado for treating private and state lands adjacent to active US Forest Service hazardous fuels mitigation projects aimed at mitigating potential impacts from wildfire events. This funding was distributed toward four projects and was awarded to the Colorado State Forest Service.

In addition to our forest restoration projects, we continue to provide significant funds to assist the State's Cooperative Forestry Programs.

CONCLUSION

In closing, the national forests in Colorado provide many benefits to the people of this state, country, and even the world. Together, with state and local governments, industry, non-profit organizations, and citizens, we will continue our work of building and sustaining resilient landscapes in Colorado. With our strong relationships, we are removing barriers to working across jurisdictions, and finding new ways to leverage State and Federal resources for the benefit of Coloradans.

This concludes my prepared remarks. I welcome any questions from members of the committees.