



March 23, 2026

Chair McCormick, Vice Chair Mauro, Committee Members
Agriculture, Water & Natural Resources Committee
200 E. Colfax Avenue
Denver, CO 80203

Submitted via online portal <https://sites.leg.gov/public-testimony/sign-up-to-testify/step-2>

Re: Vote YES on HB26-1323

Dear Chair McCormick, Vice Chair Mauro, and Committee Members:

On behalf of myself, a Gunnison County resident in House District 58, and our thousands of members and supporters across Colorado, we urge you to **vote YES on HB26-1323 to improve landscape-wildfire resiliency across Colorado's public lands.**

The Center for Biological Diversity ("Center") is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization dedicated to protecting imperiled species and the lands, waters, and climate on which both wildlife and people depend. The Center has a long history of advocating for forest and fire policies that prioritize community and infrastructure resilience, are grounded in sound science, and ensure when actions are taken on forested lands, they reduce risk rather than create new harms.



During the Cameron Peak fire, beaver wetlands provided wildlife refugia from wildfire. Emily Fairfax's 2020 Study found that even megafires hardly touch these beaver created and influenced wetland and riparian areas. Emily Fairfax/courtesy photo.

The urgency of this legislation is impossible to ignore. This past weekend in Gunnison County, despite it still being March, we applied storage wax to our skis, and temperatures reached nearly 80 degrees. The entire lack of winter this year in Colorado is an unsettling reminder of the increasingly erratic and extreme conditions Coloradans are experiencing. **Communities across the state are living with mounting uncertainty about drought, wildfire, and water security. It is the General Assembly’s responsibility to act decisively to protect people, land, wildlife, and water considering this reality.** A vote YES on HB26-1323 does just that.

This bill is not simply about wildlife management; it is about reducing risk and strengthening landscape wildfire resilience on our public lands. As the General Assembly and nearly all committee members here recently recognized with a YES vote on Senate Joint Resolution 25-009, Coloradans have a deep love and affection for our national public lands and the innumerable benefits they provide. Just Coloradans count on you to keep these lands public, we count on you to make decisions that are vital to protecting their ecological functions and resiliency.

Beavers are one of Colorado’s most effective natural tools for restoring wetlands, increasing groundwater recharge, slowing runoff, improving water quality, and mitigating wildfire impacts. Protecting them gives both human and natural communities a better chance to withstand the compounding pressures of climate change.

Colorado Parks and Wildlife’s newly published *Beaver Conservation and Management Strategy* states explicitly that the purpose of state policy is to increase and sustain beavers and beaver-influenced wetlands in suitable habitat. The strategy prioritizes restoration, nonlethal conflict resolution, and habitat monitoring. Despite this recognition of beavers’ importance, allowing recreational and commercial killing on public lands remains inconsistent with the state’s conservation goals and the species’ critical role in wildfire resilience.

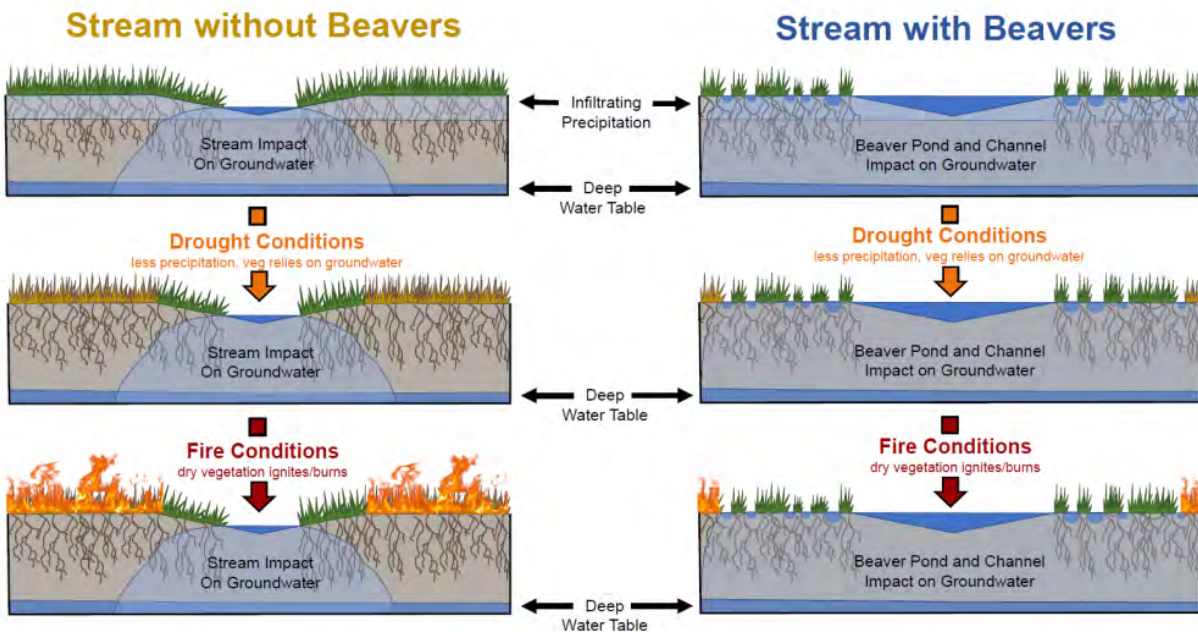
CPW has noted that estimated statewide avocational harvest rates—approximately two to four percent—fall below a threshold described in the scientific literature as conservative and unlikely to reduce populations. If that were sufficient to promote recovery, we would expect to see meaningful population growth over time. Yet CPW’s own strategy indicates that Colorado’s beaver population was estimated at roughly 50,000 animals in the early 1940s and remains at approximately that same level today.

This raises a fundamental question: if harvest is truly minimal and sustainable, why are we not seeing stronger recovery—especially given beavers’ central role in wetland function, groundwater recharge, and wildfire resilience? While the answer is uncertain, and largely due to significant information gaps,¹ this is no reason to delay action where the science is clear about this species’ benefits for wildfire resiliency.

¹ Recreational harvest reporting is limited and voluntary, nuisance take is not comprehensively tracked, and statewide population estimates are imperfect.

Peer-reviewed research, including recent studies in Colorado and the Rocky Mountain region, shows that beaver-influenced floodplains remain wetter during wildfire, experience reduced burn severity, and often function as fire refugia. Beaver-influenced wetlands and riparian corridors are key to moderating fire behavior during extreme wildfire events. Beavers slow, spread, and store water across floodplains through their dams, ponds, and channels, raising groundwater levels and maintaining greener, wetter vegetation well into drought and fire season. This hydrologic effect creates natural “speed bumps” to wildfire, reducing the likelihood that riparian areas ignite and burn severely and helping retain moisture in landscapes otherwise stressed by heat and aridity.

In a 2020 peer-reviewed study published in *Ecological Applications*,² Fairfax and Whittle examined five large wildfires across the western United States—including sites in Colorado, California, Oregon, Idaho, and Wyoming—using satellite-derived vegetation data to compare riparian areas with and without beaver activity. The results were striking: during wildfires, riparian areas with beaver dams experienced vegetation loss less than one-third as severe as similar areas without beavers. **Beaver-dammed areas stayed greener and burned less, functioning as fire refugia across a range of land cover types, burn severities, and drought conditions.**



Conceptual model of vegetation response from Fairfax, E. and Whittle, A. (2020), Smokey the Beaver: beaver-dammed riparian corridors stay green during wildfire throughout the western USA. Ecol Appl. Accepted Author Manuscript. doi:10.1002/eap.2225. Figure shows normal conditions (top), drought (middle), and fire (bottom) in creeks with (right) and without (left) beavers.

² Fairfax, E. and Whittle, A. (2020), Smokey the Beaver: beaver-dammed riparian corridors stay green during wildfire throughout the western USA. *Ecol Appl.* Accepted Author Manuscript. doi:10.1002/eap.2225. <https://esajournals.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/epdf/10.1002/eap.2225>. See also <https://emilyfairfaxscience.com/research/firebeavers/> for stop-motion video demonstrating the results of the study.

The study also found that while riparian vegetation tended to recover after fire regardless of beaver presence, beavers played a decisive role *during* wildfire by maintaining wet, fire-resistant conditions when they matter most. These beaver-created refugia likely provide critical shelter for wildlife unable to escape advancing flames and help protect soils, stream function, and vegetation from severe fire impacts. The research underscores that beavers function as low-cost, climate-resilient natural infrastructure, offering wildfire mitigation benefits that are difficult and expensive for humans to replicate, making their conservation a practical strategy for increasing landscape and community resilience in a hotter, drier future.

Local governments across Colorado recognize this reality. Communities like Grand Lake—still recovering from the East Troublesome Fire—understand firsthand the value of wetlands and intact watersheds in buffering against wildfire, flooding, and long-term ecological damage. Their **experience reinforces that protecting beavers is not an abstract environmental goal, but a practical investment in community safety and resilience.**

HB26-1323 is a measured and appropriate. It does not eliminate management flexibility or nonlethal conflict tools, which is why with amendment L.001, CPW's position is neutral. Instead, it draws a clear and responsible line: on Colorado's public lands, we should not allow recreational and commercial killing of a species the state has committed to increasing and sustaining and is a vital, natural ally in landscape wildfire resiliency.

In sum, this bill serves as a commonsense backstop to Colorado's beaver management strategy, ensuring that state actions align with stated goals and with the best available science. **By protecting beavers on public lands, HB26-1323 safeguards the natural processes that support wetlands, water security, wildfire resilience, and biodiversity for the benefit of all Coloradans.**

For these reasons, I respectfully urge the committee to vote **YES** on HB26-1323. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



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Testimony in Support

House Bill 26-1323—Concerning Wildfire Resiliency Through a Prohibition on the Taking of Beavers on Public Land in the State

Before the Colorado House Agriculture, Water & Natural Resources Committee

March 19, 2026

Dear Chair McCormick, Vice Chair Mauro, and the honorable members of the House Agriculture, Water & Natural Resources Committee:

The Animal Welfare Institute, on behalf of our members in Colorado, strongly supports House Bill (“HB”) 26-1323, Concerning Wildfire Resiliency Through a Prohibition on the Taking of Beavers on Public Land in the State. Scientific studies demonstrate that the wetland habitat beavers create through dam building provides an array of ecosystem services for people, including increases in wildfire resilience and post-fire mitigation. Scientists have therefore begun to advocate that beavers be included in wildfire mitigation planning.¹ Colorado is experiencing larger, increasingly severe, and more numerous wildfires in recent years, including several megafires over 100,000 acres. Protecting beavers is one way the state can help address damaging wildfires. We respectfully encourage you to vote in favor of this legislation and pass the bill out of committee.

The Animal Welfare Institute is dedicated to alleviating animal suffering caused by people. We seek to improve the welfare of animals everywhere: in agriculture, in commerce, in our homes and communities, in research, and in the wild. Since 1951, AWI has advanced its mission through strategically crafted policy and legal advocacy, educational programs, research and analysis, litigation, and engagement with policymakers, scientists, industry, educators, other

¹ Fairfax, E. et al. (2024). Impacts of beaver dams on riverscape burn severity during megafires in the Rocky Mountain region, western United States. *Biogeomorphic Responses to Wildfire in Fluvial Ecosystems: Geological Society of America Special Paper*, 562, 131-151. Available at: <https://pubs.geoscienceworld.org/gsa/books/edited-volume/2498/chapter/141387824/Impacts-of-beaver-dams-on-riverscape-burn-severity>.

NGOs, the media, and the public. We seek scientifically grounded protections for animals in all settings and robust enforcement of those protections.

HB 26-1323 prohibits the taking of beaver for recreational or commercial purposes on public lands, including both state lands and federal lands managed by Bureau of Land Management and United States Forest Service, to improve fire resiliency. State and federal lands make up about 40 percent of Colorado's land base,² and thus, prohibiting beaver take on these lands for recreation or commercial purposes will provide significant wildfire resiliency benefits to the people of Colorado for free. Bill 26-1323 provides a wildfire mitigation strategy, and its requirements are compatible with annual state wildfire preparedness plans³ and the Colorado Wildfire Planning and Recovery Playbook, co-authored, in part, by the Colorado Departments of Natural Resources and Colorado Public Health & Environment.⁴

I. Wildfire is a Growing Problem in Colorado.

Although wildfires provide many crucial ecological functions for fire-adapted ecosystems,⁵ due to hotter and drier weather driven by climate change and fire suppression, wildfires across the West, including Colorado,⁶ are trending larger, burning for longer duration,

² Hanson, L. A. & C. H. Vincent. (2020). Federal Land Ownership: Overview and Data. Congressional Research Service. R42346. February 21.

³ See, for example, Colorado Division of Fire Prevention & Control. (2025). 2025 Wildfire Preparedness Plan. April. Available at:

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1aCxP6RTpqePVRNsvMws2yKIgZVsGkY3o/view>.

⁴ Colorado Public Health & Environment et al. (2025). Colorado Wildfire Planning and Recovery Playbook. May. Available at: <https://cdphe.colorado.gov/Wildfire-Playbook>.

⁵ Kilgore, B. M. (1981). Fire in ecosystem distribution and structure: western forests and scrublands. Proceedings of the Conference: Fire Regimes and Ecosystem Properties. H. A. Mooney et al. (eds.) USDA Forest Service, General Technical Report WO-GTR-26; Lyon, L. J. et al. 2000. Introduction, Chapter 1. Wildland Fire in Ecosystems: Effects of Fire on Fauna. J. K. Smith (ed.) Gen. Tech. Rep. RMRS-GTR-42-vol. 1. Ogden, UT: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service, Rocky Mountain Research Station; Sugihara, N.G. et al. (2004). Fire as an ecological process. Fire in California's Ecosystems. (Chapter 4) N.G. Sugihara et al. (eds). University of California Press; Kennedy, P. L., & Fontaine, J. B. (2009). Synthesis of Knowledge on the Effects of Fire and Fire Surrogates on Wildlife in U.S. Dry Forests. Oregon State University Agricultural Experiment Station. Special Report 1096. September; Fuhlendorf, S. D. et al. (2006). Should heterogeneity be the basis for conservation? Grassland bird response to fire and grazing. Ecological applications, 16(5), 1706-1716.

⁶ Gifford, T. & Barbier, E. (2025). Battle Scars: Trends in Wildfire Size and Impact across Colorado. Regional Economic Development Institute, Colorado State University. March. at 1.

burning at times outside historic seasons, and generally becoming more severe.⁷ Wildfires are also becoming more destructive as people have built homes close to fire-prone natural areas.⁸

II. Beavers are Nature's Firefighters.

In creating and maintaining habitat for themselves, beavers provide habitat for other wildlife and a range of additional ecosystem services that benefit both wildlife and people, including wildfire resilience and mitigation.⁹ Beavers are “ecosystem engineers” that build permeable dams across rivers and streams.¹⁰ Beaver dams slow the flow of water, which creates systems of pools and ponds.¹¹ Beavers also dig travel canals through floodplains to access food and building materials, which further increases water storage and widens the waterway.¹² This damming and channeling create what are called “beaver wetlands.”¹³

Beaver ecosystem services include the creation and maintenance of drought and fire-resistant riverscapes that remain wet and green during wildfires, including high-severity fires and megafires of over 100,000 acres.¹⁴ Beaver wetlands build resilience to wildfire by increasing the

⁷ Jolly, W. M. et al. (2015). Climate-induced variations in global wildfire danger from 1979 to 2013. *Nature communications*, 6(1), 7537; Westerling, A. L. (2016). Increasing western US forest wildfire activity: sensitivity to changes in the timing of spring. *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society B: Biological Sciences*, 371(1696), 20150178; Balch, J. K. et al. (2017). Human-started wildfires expand the fire niche across the United States. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 114(11), 2946-2951; Parks, S. A., & Abatzoglou, J. T. (2020). Warmer and drier fire seasons contribute to increases in area burned at high severity in western US forests from 1985 to 2017. *Geophysical Research Letters*, 47(22), e2020GL089858.

⁸ Radeloff, V.C. et al. (2018). Rapid growth of the US wildland-urban interface raises wildfire risk. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 115(13), 3314-3319.

⁹ *Id.*; Fairfax, E. et al. (2024). Impacts of beaver dams on riverscape burn severity during megafires in the Rocky Mountain region, western United States. *Biogeomorphic Responses to Wildfire in Fluvial Ecosystems: Geological Society of America Special Paper*, 562, 131-151.

¹⁰ Wohl, E. (2021). Legacy effects of loss of beavers in the continental United States. *Environmental Research Letters*, 16(2), 025010. Available at: <https://iopscience.iop.org/article/10.1088/1748-9326/abd34e/meta..>

¹¹ Brazier, R. E. et al. (2021). Beaver: Nature's ecosystem engineers. *Wiley Interdisciplinary Reviews: Water*, 8(1), e1494.

¹² *Id.*

¹³ *Id.*

¹⁴ Fairfax, E., & Whittle, A. (2020). Smokey the Beaver: beaver-dammed riparian corridors stay green during wildfire throughout the western United States. *Ecological Applications*, 30(8), e02225. Available at: <https://esajournals.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1002/eap.2225>; Foster, C. N. et al. (2020). Animals as agents in fire regimes. *Trends in Ecology & Evolution*, 35(4), 346-356. Available at: [https://www.cell.com/trends/ecology-evolution/abstract/S0169-5347\(20\)30004-5](https://www.cell.com/trends/ecology-evolution/abstract/S0169-5347(20)30004-5); Wohl, E. et al. (2022). Biogeomorphic influences on river corridor resilience to wildfire disturbances in a mountain stream of the Southern Rockies, USA. *Science of the Total Environment*, 820, 153321. Available at: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0048969722004132>; Fairfax, E. et al. (2024). Impacts of beaver dams on riverscape burn severity during megafires in the Rocky Mountain region,

size of buffer zones of well-hydrated, green vegetation.¹⁵ The U.S. Forest Service has stated: “[a] lack of beavers has resulted in an increased intensity of drought and wildfires in the west as fires spread rapidly across parched landscapes.”¹⁶ The photograph below shows a small area of a beaver wetland after the 2021 Beckwourth Fire (105,670 acres)¹⁷ in California, illustrating how these areas remain unburned and green with live vegetation even after a large wildfire.¹⁸

Beaver Wetland Next to a Burned Forest Area¹⁹



western United States. Biogeomorphic Responses to Wildfire in Fluvial Ecosystems: Geological Society of America Special Paper, 562, 131-151.

¹⁵ Fairfax, E., & Whittle, A. (2020). Smokey the Beaver: beaver-dammed riparian corridors stay green during wildfire throughout the western United States. *Ecological Applications*, 30(8), e02225..

¹⁶ Cleveland, J. (2023). Firefighting Beavers: Fighting Fires, One Beaver Dam at a Time. U.S. Forest Service. October 2. Available at: <https://www.fs.usda.gov/about-agency/features/firefighting-beavers>.

¹⁷ Cal Fire. (2026). Beckwourth Complex. California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection. Available at: <https://www.fire.ca.gov/incidents/2021/7/4/beckwourth-complex>.

¹⁸ Fairfax, E. et al. (2024). Impacts of beaver dams on riverscape burn severity during megafires in the Rocky Mountain region, western United States. *Biogeomorphic Responses to Wildfire in Fluvial Ecosystems: Geological Society of America Special Paper*, 562, 131-151.

¹⁹ *Id.*

A. Unburned Beaver Wetlands Provide “Fire Refugia” During Wildfires.²⁰

Beaver wetlands and the areas around are typically more resilient to wildfires than waterways without beavers, and this provides several benefits,²¹ including fire refugia.²² Fire refugia are unburned or minimally burned landscape patches within or near a wildfire perimeter that support resilience, biodiversity, and postfire ecosystem functioning.²³ Fire refugia offer habitat where individuals and populations of plants and animals can survive wildfires.²⁴ Additionally, unburned beaver wetland vegetation patches provide seed sources and protect pollinators, which aid plant regeneration in nearby burned areas after wildfires.²⁵ They provide postfire food sources for animals that can disperse into higher severity burned areas to influence postfire wildlife repopulation.²⁶ To help illustrate this point, the two satellite photographs below (page 6) of the same location show a beaver complex before and after a wildfire, with the second photo clearly highlighting the green beaver wetland surrounded by burned vegetation.

²⁰ *Id.*; Fairfax, E. et al. (2024). Impacts of beaver dams on riverscape burn severity during megafires in the Rocky Mountain region, western United States. *Biogeomorphic Responses to Wildfire in Fluvial Ecosystems: Geological Society of America Special Paper*, 562, 131-151.

²¹ Fairfax, E. and Whittle, A. 2020. Smokey the Beaver: beaver-dammed riparian corridors stay green during wildfire throughout the western United States. *Ecological Applications*. 30(8): e02225. Available at: <https://esajournals.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1002/eap.2225>.

²² Fairfax, E. et al. (2024). Impacts of beaver dams on riverscape burn severity during megafires in the Rocky Mountain region, western United States. *Biogeomorphic Responses to Wildfire in Fluvial Ecosystems: Geological Society of America Special Paper*, 562, 131-151.

²³ Definition modified from Meddens, A. J. et al. (2018). Fire refugia: what are they, and why do they matter for global change?. *BioScience*, 68(12), 944-954.

²⁴ Meddens, A. J. et al. (2018). Fire refugia: what are they, and why do they matter for global change?. *BioScience*, 68(12), 944-954.

²⁵ *Id.*

²⁶ Meddens, A. J. et al. (2018). Fire refugia: what are they, and why do they matter for global change?. *BioScience*, 68(12), 944-954.

Pre-fire Landscape with a Beaver Wetland Complex²⁷



Post-fire Landscape with a Beaver Wetland Complex²⁸



²⁷ Fairfax, E. et al. (2024). Impacts of beaver dams on riverscape burn severity during megafires in the Rocky Mountain region, western United States. *Biogeomorphic Responses to Wildfire in Fluvial Ecosystems: Geological Society of America Special Paper*, 562, 131-151.

²⁸ *Id.*

B. Beaver Wetlands Demonstrated Fire Resistance during the 2020 Cameron Peak and East Troublesome Megafires.²⁹

The 2020 Cameron Peak and East Troublesome wildfires remain the two largest wildfires ever recorded in Colorado (as of March 2026).³⁰ They are considered “megafires,” defined as fires larger than 100,000 acres,³¹ with Cameron Peak burning 208,913 acres and the East Troublesome burning 193,812 acres.³² Each of the fires burned at different severity levels, with patches of high-severity and low-severity fire interspersed with unburned patches.³³

Fairfax et al. (2024) studied fire severity across the Cameron Peak and East Troublesome burn areas to, in part, assess whether riverscapes with beaver dams have lower burn severity than riverscapes without beaver dams and areas outside of the riverscapes.³⁴ They found that beaver wetlands remained largely unburned.³⁵ Close to 90 percent of the riverscapes with beavers had just unburned and low-severity burned areas compared to riverscapes without beavers that had 60 percent. See the graphs below (page 8) that help summarize Fairfax et al. (2024)’s study results.

²⁹ *Id.*

³⁰ Colorado Division of Fire Prevention & Control, Colorado Department of Public Safety. (2026). Historical Wildfire Information, website. Available at: <https://dfpc.colorado.gov/sections/wildfire-information-center/historical-wildfire-information>.

³¹ Linley, G. D. et al. (2022). What do you mean, ‘megafire’?. *Global Ecology and Biogeography*, 31(10), 1906-1922.

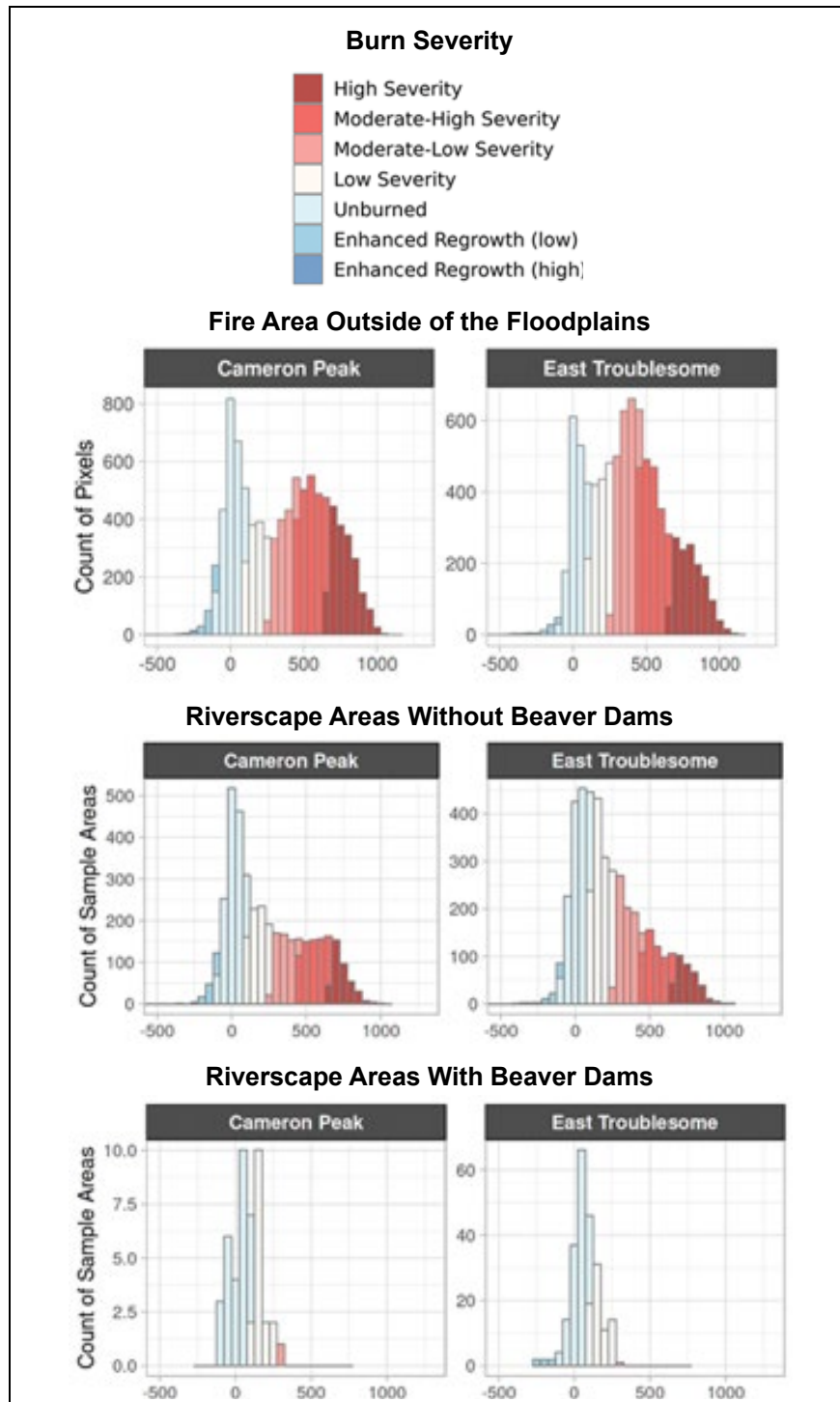
³² Colorado Division of Fire Prevention & Control, Colorado Department of Public Safety. (2026). Historical Wildfire Information, website. Available at: <https://dfpc.colorado.gov/sections/wildfire-information-center/historical-wildfire-information>.

³³ Fairfax, E. et al. (2024). Impacts of beaver dams on riverscape burn severity during megafires in the Rocky Mountain region, western United States. *Biogeomorphic Responses to Wildfire in Fluvial Ecosystems: Geological Society of America Special Paper*, 562, 131-151, at 142.

³⁴ *Id.*

³⁵ *Id.*

Results from Fairfax et al. (2024): Burn Severity by Fire and Landscape Type of the Cameron Peak and East Troublesome Fires in Colorado³⁶



³⁶ *Id.* at 140 (modified Figure 4).

Fairfax et al. (2024) offered the following conclusions based on their research:

This study showed that beaver-modified riverscapes are resistant to megafire-scale disturbance. This resilience is directly attributable to beaver dam- and canal-building activity, although the geomorphic settings conducive to beaver activity also confer a degree of resilience. Therefore, even with the current degraded state of many river systems and the trajectory of increasing wildfire severity under a changing climate, beaver ecosystem engineering offers proven resilience to megafires and a reliable source of wildfire refugia for freshwater-dependent biological communities, including humans.³⁷

By protecting beavers on public land and encouraging their restoration, Bill 26-1323 can help bolster fire resilience in Colorado. Fairfax et al. (2024) also put forth that beavers should be incorporated into wildfire risk reduction strategies, stating:

Beaver ecosystem engineering is complementary to, not in opposition to, current fire-mitigation strategies. Beaver populations, and in turn beaver dam building, can be part of a comprehensive fire-mitigation strategy while offering additional benefits to biological communities, including humans, even when fire is not an active threat. Beaver conservation, beaver coexistence strategies, and beaver-based restoration should be strongly considered for inclusion when planning fire risk-mitigation strategies, and when developing or updating watershed and land management plans.³⁸

C. Beaver Wetlands Serve as Natural Fuel Breaks that Help Contain Wildfires.³⁹

When working to suppress or extinguish wildfires, firefighters may use or create fuel or fire breaks intended to stop or slow fire spread in specific places, and beaver wetlands likely can act as fire breaks as well.⁴⁰ Fuel and fire breaks are often human made, as suggested in the following definition by Gannon et al. (2023):

Fuel breaks are roughly linear features designed to improve firefighting access, safety, and effectiveness by reducing fuel loads or altering fuel type or arrangement. Fuel breaks are often associated with fire breaks, which are narrower strips with no fuel, such as a road or a dozer line specifically maintained for fire control. . . . The desired effects on fire behavior may include reduced fire intensity, crown fire potential, spotting, ignition probability, and fire residence

³⁷ *Id.*, at 148.

³⁸ *Id.*, at 148.

³⁹ *Id.*

⁴⁰ *Id.*

times. Commonly sought-after benefits for suppression include: improved access, visibility, and safety; reduced resistance to control (greater fireline production); reduced mop up effort; better aerial retardant function; and improved conditions for suppression firing. Ultimately, the purpose of constructing a fuel break or fire break is to improve control likelihood, so effectiveness is usually judged by whether the feature holds when engaged by fire.⁴¹

Existing land use elements such as roads or natural features including water bodies also act as fuel breaks.⁴² Fairfax et al. (2024) stated:

Large rivers already are utilized as fire breaks in small- to medium-sized fires. Fire-management plans take advantage of the fact that water does not burn. Riverscapes include far more than just the river channel itself. They include the floodplains, the wetlands, the wet meadows, the side channels, the subsurface hyporheic zone, and the shallow groundwater systems historically created and maintained by widespread native beaver activity across most river valley bottoms. In a functioning riverscape, these elements increase wetted area and fire resistance and refugia. Beavers, and their innate ecosystem engineering behaviors, are uniquely capable of restoring and rewetting riverscapes even under highly modified and simplified modern stream and river conditions.⁴³

Researchers have noted recently that beaver wetlands have served as fuel breaks.⁴⁴ For example, Fairfax et al. (2024) stated:

Anecdotal evidence from the 2021 Cedar Creek Fire in north-central Washington demonstrates a large beaver complex serving as a natural firebreak and a point for enacting strategic fire protection for human infrastructure. This beaver complex helped protect structures near Winthrop, Washington, by providing a safe point

⁴¹ Gannon, B. et al. (2023). A quantitative analysis of fuel break effectiveness drivers in Southern California National Forests. *Fire*, 6(3), 104, 104-105, citations omitted.

⁴² Hersey, C., & Barros, A. (2022). The role of shaded fuel breaks in support of Washington's 20-Year Forest Health Strategic Plan: Eastern Washington. Washington Department of Natural Resources. Olympia, WA.

⁴³ Fairfax, E. et al. (2024). Impacts of beaver dams on riverscape burn severity during megafires in the Rocky Mountain region, western United States. *Biogeomorphic Responses to Wildfire in Fluvial Ecosystems: Geological Society of America Special Paper*, 562, 131-151, at 133.

⁴⁴ Weirich, J. J. (2021). Beaver moderated fire resistance in the north cascades and potential for climate change adaptation. Thesis, Master of Science. Eastern Washington University; Fairfax, E. et al. (2024). Impacts of beaver dams on riverscape burn severity during megafires in the Rocky Mountain region, western United States. *Biogeomorphic Responses to Wildfire in Fluvial Ecosystems: Geological Society of America Special Paper*, 562, 131-151. Available at: <https://pubs.geoscienceworld.org/gsa/books/edited-volume/2498/chapter/141387824/Impacts-of-beaver-dams-on-riverscape-burn-severity>.

from which to backburn to remove hazardous fuels from the oncoming wildfire path.⁴⁵

Therefore, HB 26-1323 would protect a system of natural fuel breaks across public land in Colorado.

D. Beaver Dams Trap Sediment After Wildfires.⁴⁶

After wildfires, beaver dams capture the sediment that flows downstream, which is important because burned areas experience increased erosion.⁴⁷ By catching post-fire sediment upstream, beaver dams increase water quality.⁴⁸ Post-fire run-off can include high concentrations of phosphate and other nutrients, and this can lead to downstream algal blooms in downstream ponds.⁴⁹ Many fish, amphibians, and aquatic macroinvertebrates are sensitive to high levels of sediment, which can suffocate these species.⁵⁰ Increased sediment storage after wildfires improves watershed recovery and resilience.⁵¹ HB 26-1323 will protect many beavers on public lands, enabling us to benefit from postfire sediment capture, which will improve water quality, reduce burdens on water supply systems, and protect sensitive wildlife.

⁴⁵ Fairfax, E. et al. (2024). Impacts of beaver dams on riverscape burn severity during megafires in the Rocky Mountain region, western United States. *Biogeomorphic Responses to Wildfire in Fluvial Ecosystems: Geological Society of America Special Paper*, 562, 131-151, at 146-147.

⁴⁶ Rosell, F. et al. (2005). Ecological impact of beavers *Castor fiber* and *Castor canadensis* and their ability to modify ecosystems. *Mammal review*, 35(3-4), 248-276. Available at:

<https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/j.1365-2907.2005.00067.x>; Puttock, A. (2017). Eurasian beaver activity increases water storage, attenuates flow and mitigates diffuse pollution from intensively-managed grasslands. *Science of the total environment*, 576, 430-443. Available at:

<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0048969716323099>; Grudzinski, B.P. (2022). A global review of beaver dam impacts: Stream conservation implications across biomes. *Global ecology and conservation*, 37, e02163. Available at:

<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2351989422001652>.

⁴⁷ Dunn, S. B. et al. (2024). Post-fire sediment attenuation in beaver ponds, Rocky Mountains, CO and WY, USA. *Earth Surface Processes and Landforms*, 49(13), 4340-4354. Available at:

<https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1002/esp.5970>.

⁴⁸ Rosell, F. et al. (2005). Ecological impact of beavers *Castor fiber* and *Castor canadensis* and their ability to modify ecosystems. *Mammal review*, 35(3-4), 248-276. *Mammal Review*. 35(3-4): 248-276.

Available at: <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/j.1365-2907.2005.00067.x>; (2017). Eurasian beaver activity increases water storage, attenuates flow and mitigates diffuse pollution from intensively-managed grasslands. *Science of the total environment*, 576, 430-443; Grudzinski, B.P. (2022). A global review of beaver dam impacts: Stream conservation implications across biomes. *Global ecology and conservation*, 37, e02163.

⁴⁹ Gresswell, R. E. (1999). Fire and aquatic ecosystems in forested biomes of North America. *Transactions of the American fisheries society*, 128(2), 193-221.

⁵⁰ Rinne, J. N. (1996). Management briefs: Short-term effects of wildfire on fishes and aquatic macroinvertebrates in the southwestern United States. *North American Journal of Fisheries Management*, 16(3), 653-658.

⁵¹ Dunn, S. B. et al. (2024). Post-fire sediment attenuation in beaver ponds, Rocky Mountains, CO and WY, USA. *Earth Surface Processes and Landforms*, 49(13), 4340-4354.

III. Conclusion

HB 26-1323 will help protect and restore beavers in order to more fully realize the wildfire and other benefits that beavers provide to wildlife and humans. Protecting beavers under the provisions of HB 26-1323 will help Colorado capitalize on the fire mitigation benefits beaver wetlands provide. We therefore respectfully encourage you to vote in favor of this legislation. If you have any questions or if there is any additional information we can provide, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Sincerely,



Lauren McCain
Senior Policy Advisor
Terrestrial Wildlife Program
Denver, Colorado
Email: lmccain@awionline.org



Johanna Hamburger
Director and Senior Attorney
Terrestrial Wildlife Program
Lakewood, Colorado
Email: johanna@awionline.org

House Agriculture, Water & Natural Resources

03/23/2026 01:30 PM

HB26-1323 Wildfire Resiliency Prohibiting Taking of Beavers

Typed Text of Testimony Submitted

Name, Position, Representing	Typed Text of Testimony
<p>RAINER GERBATSCH</p> <p>For himself</p>	<p>Chair McCormick and Members of the Committee,</p> <p>Please support HB26-1323.</p> <p>HB26-1323 is a narrow, practical, and forward-looking bill. It applies to beavers on public lands and addresses only recreational and commercial take. It does not eliminate all beaver management. As introduced, it preserves room for other lawful purposes and allows the Parks and Wildlife Commission to adopt implementing rules, with the important requirement that any such rules protect the role of beavers and beaver-created wetlands in the wildfire resiliency of public lands.</p> <p>That is an appropriate and timely policy choice. In a hotter, drier Colorado, beavers are not just another furbearer. They are natural water engineers. Their dams and wetlands slow water, store moisture, improve riparian condition, expand habitat, and support the wet landscape function that helps reduce wildfire spread and severity and supports recovery after fire.</p> <p>Water scarcity is no longer just a local or temporary concern; it is becoming a defining management reality. Global water stress is increasing, agriculture remains the largest user of freshwater withdrawals, and climate change is making droughts more frequent, longer, and more severe. In that context, Colorado should be especially cautious about allowing avocational or commercial killing of a species that functions as living water infrastructure.</p> <p>CPW has invested real work into beaver conservation and management, and occupancy, distribution, and harvest reporting can provide useful information. But those tools do not fully resolve abundance, trend, total mortality across pathways, or the ecological cost of removing beavers from watersheds. Presence on the landscape does not, by itself, justify continued recreational or commercial take on public lands. Biological persistence is not the same as protection of ecological function.</p> <p>That is why HB26-1323 is reasonable. It applies precaution where the public benefits of keeping beavers alive are high and where the justification for recreational and commercial take on public lands is weak. It is not a broad restructuring of wildlife law. It is a focused public-land resilience measure.</p> <p>HB26-1323 is a measured step that aligns wildlife policy on public lands with current climate and watershed reality. For those reasons, I urge a favorable recommendation.</p> <p>Sincerely,</p> <p>Rainer Gerbatsch</p>
<p>Ingrid Moore</p>	<p>Please vote YES on this bill.</p>

For themselves	Protecting beavers on public lands provides a cost-free natural solution to Colorado's escalating wildfire and drought challenges, as beaver-created wetlands serve as natural firebreaks and enhance watershed protection. This approach leverages ecological engineering by a keystone species to reduce long-term firefighting and recovery costs while supporting wildlife habitat and imperiled species recovery.
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Toby Stensland
8293 Bell Ranch Rd
Evergreen, CO 80439

March 23, 2026

Against HB26-1323 - Wildfire Resiliency Prohibiting Taking of Beavers

I am a hunter, fisherman, and overall avid outdoorsman. I don't hunt beavers, and I don't know anyone who does, but I've heard they are good eating if you know how to properly process them. Beaver management should not come from the legislature, and definitely not under the pretense of wildfire resiliency. Leave beaver management to CPW, and take real actions for wildfire concerns. This bill is a waste of time on something that is not a problem, so please kill it quickly.

Thank you for your time and your service to the State of Colorado,
Toby Stensland
toby@stensland.com

NATIONAL RIFLE ASSOCIATION OF AMERICA

INSTITUTE FOR LEGISLATIVE ACTION

11250 WAPLES MILL ROAD FAIRFAX,

VIRGINIA 22030



NRA

March 19, 2026

House Agriculture, Water & Natural Resources
200 East Colfax Avenue
Denver, CO 80203

RE: House Bill 26-1323: Wildfire Resiliency Prohibiting Taking of Beavers

Position: OPPOSE

Dear Madam Chairwoman and Committee Members,

To the Members of the House Agriculture, Water & Natural Resources Committee:

On behalf of the National Rifle Association and the thousands of law-abiding sportsmen and sportswomen in Colorado, I am writing to articulate our firm opposition to House Bill 26-1323. This legislation constitutes a direct challenge to a centuries-old American tradition of hunting and trapping and aims to supplant professional wildlife management with ideologically motivated mandates.

For centuries, hunting and trapping have been fundamental components of the North American Model of Wildlife Conservation, positioning sportsmen as the "original conservationists" who finance the very agencies charged with safeguarding our natural resources. House Bill 26-1323 disregards this heritage by enacting a comprehensive prohibition on the recreational and commercial harvesting of beavers on public lands, thereby effectively criminalizing a legitimate and longstanding use of our collective outdoor spaces.

Moreover, this legislation is entirely at odds with the professional wildlife management findings of the state's own authorities. Recently, Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW) released its "Final Beaver Conservation and Management Strategy," which delineates a comprehensive framework for the species. Importantly, CPW's strategy explicitly recognizes "Beaver harvest management" as a critical topic and a vital component of its coordinated conservation approach. Implementing a complete ban, as proposed in HB 26-1323, directly conflicts with the expert strategy formulated by the agency that has effectively overseen these populations for many years.

The declaration by the General Assembly that CPW is "not the sole authority" over these lands appears to be a covert maneuver aimed at circumventing scientifically grounded wildlife management, favoring political objectives. Diminishing CPW's authority to oversee harvests through conventional hunting and trapping practices compromises the agency's mission to "perpetuate the wildlife resources of the state" and jeopardizes the approximately \$6 billion annually generated by Colorado's outdoor industry.

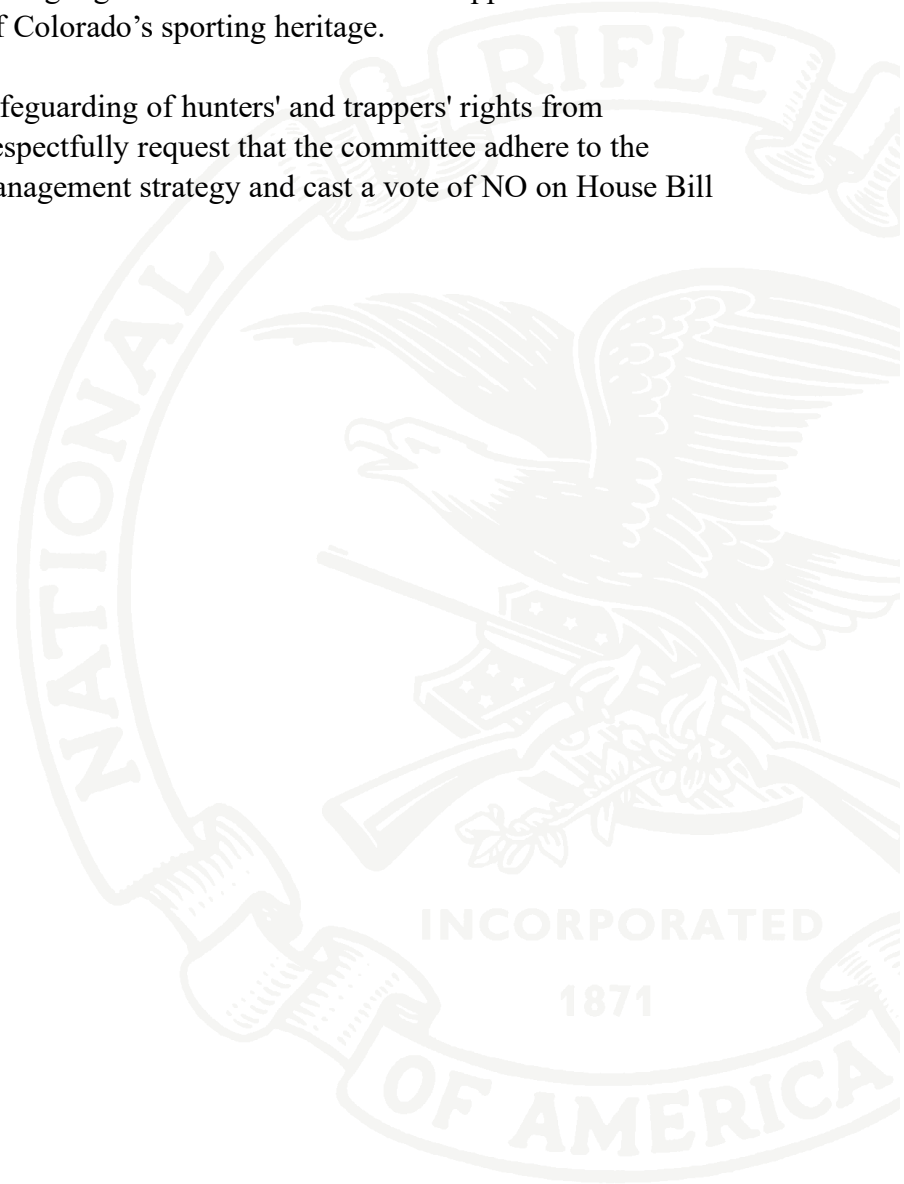
Under this legislation, law-abiding citizens exercising a traditional right would incur severe penalties, including a \$1,000 fine and the allocation of 20 license suspension points. We contend that professional management—encompassing regulated harvest—is the sole approach to ensure wildfire resilience and the safeguarding of Colorado's sporting heritage.

The NRA continues to advocate for the safeguarding of hunters' and trappers' rights from excessive bureaucratic interference. We respectfully request that the committee adhere to the scientific principles outlined in CPW's management strategy and cast a vote of NO on House Bill 26-1323.

Sincerely,

Kelvin Curtis

Kelvin Curtis
State Director – Colorado
NRA-ILA



**Testimony in opposition to: HB26-1323. Wildlife Resiliency Prohibiting Taking of
Beavers**

The Firearms Coalition of Colorado
PO Box 1454, Englewood, CO 80150-1454

Thank you, Chair and Committee.

My name is Robert Edmiston. I am with the Firearms Coalition of Colorado an NRA-affiliated, all-volunteer, grassroots organization dedicated to the protection of individual rights and public safety.

I am a former U.S. Army Officer and Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor. I have a Master's Degree in Psychology, Counseling and Guidance.

I am writing in opposition to the measure under consideration.

Fur is a natural material that biodegrades without damaging the environment. Faux fur is often made of plastic products, which are petroleum-based, and which may fall into the category of "forever plastics." There has been considerable research into the proliferation of plastics in our environment. These human-developed creations are showing up in water and food supplies and even in our bodies. For the sake of environmental and ecological safety, we believe that this type of legislation that creates more reliance on artificial substances should be delayed until additional research can be done to fully evaluate the effects of plastics on our physical and mental health.

[Microplastics and our health: What the science says](#). Stanford Medicine News Center

In addition, Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW) manages beaver populations, as well as other fur-bearing animals, on state lands. According to Coloradoans for Responsible Wildlife Management, CPW staff has indicated that "furbearer populations are currently managed sustainably under existing regulations."

We urge a "No" vote on this proposal.

Thank you.

Robert Edmiston
Volunteer Lobbyist
The Firearms Coalition of Colorado
PO Box 1454, Englewood, CO 80150-1454