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March 5, 2015

Honorable Rob Bishop, Chairman
Honorable Raul Grijalva, Ranking Member
House Subcommittee on Public Lands and Environmental Regulation
1324 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Re: ***Healthy Forest Management and Wildfire Prevention Act of 2015.***

Dear Chairman Bishop and Ranking Member Grijalva:

This is written on behalf of the Board of Directors of the San Luis Valley Water Conservancy District (District).

The District was formed pursuant to Colorado Revised Statutes 37- 45 -101, *et seq.*, in the 1940's and since that time has represented the water users and their interests in the San Luis Valley of Colorado. The District's Board is made up of farmers, ranchers, and business owners who understand the importance of sustainable surface and groundwater management.

The District's Board unanimously supports the proposed ***Healthy Forest Management and Wildfire Prevention Act of 2015.***

It is the understanding of the District's Board that the House Subcommittee on Public Lands and Environmental Regulation will be considering the ***Healthy Forest Management and Wildfire Prevention Act of 2015***, hereafter referred to as the Act. The District's Board wishes to provide some comments for consideration during this hearing.

The State of Colorado and much of the Western United States has been hit with severe drought conditions in recent years. This, coupled with areas of extensive insect infestation and thick stands of forest overgrowth, has created an environment ripe for intense wild fire. In fact, in Colorado 2012 and 2013 were two of the worst fire seasons in recent memory. The Board, therefore, supports proactive measures to address forest health and mitigate the dangers unnaturally intense wild fires pose to human safety, property, infrastructure, wildlife habitat and water quality. In addition, it is not fully understood how these conditions may affect the functions of our watersheds. The proposed Act contains provisions that we believe take much needed steps to address these issues.

Specifically, the Act openly identifies the issue at hand, and of great importance, vests actual authority to identify high risk areas and initiate mitigation measures to those most able to recognize the risk and with the most at stake should a wild fire erupt, that is, the respective states in coordination with county governments. The Act provides such authority to the Departments of Interior and Agriculture as well, it is important the states and counties have the ability to address local wild fire threats.

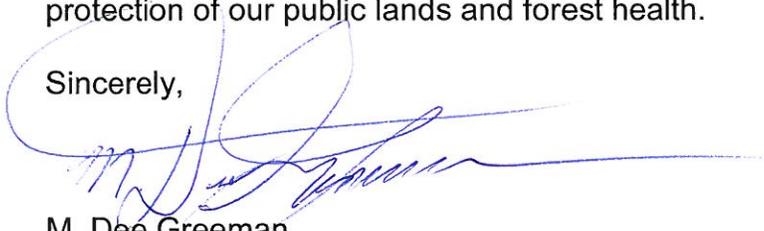
The Act also recognizes the importance of cooperative mitigation efforts, in the spirit of which it provides for good neighbor authorities wherein the federal government may contract with the states to carry out forest health restoration activities. Again, as each respective state has much at stake in maintaining the health and viability of our public forests, this heavy local involvement garners our enthusiastic support. The stewardship contracting timeframe of up to 20 years allowed for in the Act is, in our view, provides a common sense measure fostering comprehensive, long term forest health projects.

The District's Board fully understands that no entity can initiate mitigation measures autonomously and with impunity, which is why they support the Act's express direction that all forest health projects comply with established environmental review procedures and current resource management plans. An element of consistency in addressing forest health is, in the District's Board opinion, good common sense, and receives our full support.

It is the nature of the Western United States' climate to see cycles of ample precipitation and drought, and insect infestation will always be a part of the equation. It is known that the state of our forests' health was, in many areas, experiencing some deterioration and a lack of diversity in tree age. It has been known that this condition would lend itself to large, intensive and destructive wild fires, and it seems that these predictions are coming to fruition. It is the District's Board view that actions to combat the dangers posed by wild fires ought not to be reactive but proactive. In that light, they view the Act as a valuable tool to address fire mitigation in the long term, and wish to express our full support for the bill.

Thank you and your subcommittee members for your efforts regarding this issue and for providing state and local government the tools and provisions necessary to ensure the protection of our public lands and forest health.

Sincerely,



M. Dee Greeman
Chair, Board of Directors

cc: Representative Tipton