



MONTROSE COUNTY
COLORADO

BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

July 16th, 2012

The Honorable Rob Bishop, Chairman
The Honorable Raúl Grijalva, Ranking Member
House Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests and Public Lands
1324 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Bishop and Ranking Member Grijalva:

We understand that the House Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests and Public Lands will be considering HR 6089, the Healthy Forest Management Act of 2012. We wish 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 this past year. 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, this summer has already seen one of the worst fire seasons in recent memory. We therefore support 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. HR 6089 contains provisions that we believe take much needed steps to address this issue.

HR 6089 identifies the issue at hand and vests actual authority to initiate mitigation measures with states in coordination with county governments. HR 6089 provides such authority to the Departments of Interior and Agriculture as well, but we stress the importance of arming our states and counties with the ability to address wild fire threats in our back yards. While we appreciate any efforts to include our input in an advisory or cooperative role, we very much prefer the flexibility allowed to actually initiate mitigation measures.

HR 6089 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 HR 6089 is, in our view, a common sense measure fostering comprehensive, long term forest health projects.

161 South Townsend Avenue · Montrose, CO 81401

Phone 970.249.7755 · FAX 970.249.7761

We further appreciate the expedited procedures allowed for in HR 6089 for emergency hazardous fuels reduction projects in identified high risk areas. Risks to property, infrastructure, irreplaceable historic and cultural sites, and public safety dictate a sense of urgency in mitigating nearby fuel load risk. Nature waits for no one, and with common sense measures and caution, high risk areas can be protected in rapid fashion. We believe that enhanced ability to conduct fuels mitigation is of particular importance to Colorado.

The recent implementation of the Colorado Roadless Rule continued the barriers to forest and fuels management which were caused by the 2001 Roadless Rule. Due to these poorly conceived policies, Colorado residents are at increased risk from catastrophic wildfire. These rules prevent forest specific planning efforts from addressing critical issues like the beetle infestation and fuels reduction. As a result, local governments in Colorado have lost the ability to address fuels and fire related issues through participation in forest planning processes. It is our sincere hope that HR 6089 is the first of many legislative actions geared towards remedying the dangers caused by these administrative policies.

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. We have known for a long period 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 this season. It is our view that actions to combat the dangers posed by wild fires should be proactive and not reactive. In that light, we view HR 6089 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. We very much hope this insight proves valuable to you and your colleagues.

Sincerely,



David White
Chairman



Gary Ellis
Vice-Chairman



Ron Henderson
Commissioner