

## **COLORADO FOREST AND WATER ALLIANCE**

### **Historic Success Stories on Forest-Water Quality Leadership**

**POSITION:** The Colorado Forest and Water Alliance (COFWA) applauds the numerous Colorado success stories of proactive, innovative, and collaborative approaches to tackling forest health and watershed protection in different forest types across our state, and encourages the future support for this approach by federal, state and local agencies and organizations.

**BACKGROUND:** COFWA recognizes that all Coloradans benefit from healthy forests and protected water resources. If our forests remain unhealthy, they are susceptible to significant insect and disease infestation, and the ever-increasing risk of unnaturally large and severe wildfires resulting in devastating post-fire flooding, erosion, degradation of water quality, and damage to water infrastructure. The environmental, economic and social costs of poor forest health are borne by both rural and urban Coloradans, and the eighteen other states that rely on Colorado's headwaters for their water supply. Finally, these extreme fires cause air-quality impacts that result in negative health outcomes for many citizens, and increased health-care costs for all of us.

COFWA recognizes that decision making must be grounded in science-based, proactive, and collaborative approaches to land management across all land ownership boundaries in the state. Science-based understanding supports strategic active forest management to reduce risks of insects, disease, catastrophic wildfires and post-fire threats, while protecting the natural resource base that all life depends on. Science-based understanding also helps create broad support for forest-resiliency projects at an increased pace and scale than currently exists. Collaboration assures that projects meet the needs of the many, and respects the needs of citizens.

COFWA celebrates the myriad efforts tackled across the state, which this short list exemplifies:

- Creation of over 70 forest and watershed collaboratives, beginning as early as 1987;
- Implementation of the Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program projects (CFLRP) on the Front Range and the Uncompahgre Plateau, which have implemented forest restoration projects on over 41K acres since 2009;
- Creation of state and local tax and financing options, such as development of the state's Wildfire Risk Reduction Grant program (allocated over \$14 million dollars on a matching basis since 2013), or Summit County's Wildfire Prevention tax (voter-approved property tax providing \$1 million annually);
- Implementation of the Colorado Bark Beetle Collaborative, an intergovernmental cooperative between federal, state, municipal and county governments to address the mountain pine beetle epidemic simultaneously affecting a five county area in 2005.
- Implementation of the Forests to Faucets program of work, through which municipal water providers have invested millions of dollars per year in partnership with federal land managers to mitigate wildfire risk around critical water resource areas;
- Creation of Good Neighbor Authority—in which cross-boundary work can be completed on both private and federal lands. This program was piloted in Colorado in 2000, and expanded in the 2018 Farm Bill to cover the entire country;
- Implementation of Colorado's Water Plan, which included a strong focus on the nexus of water and forests, and emphasized watershed health as a critical strategy to protect the interests of Coloradans.

This historic leadership laid the foundation for new innovative approaches that are actively accelerating today.

*The members of the Colorado Forest & Water Alliance (COFWA) have joined together for mutual assistance in advocating at state and federal levels about policies, funding, and programs that support meaningful and measurable improvements in forest health and watershed resiliency benefiting Colorado.*

**Colorado Forest & Water Alliance Members: Colorado Water Congress, Colorado Timber Industry,  
Club 20, and the Watershed Health Investment Partners**

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