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EXECUTIVE ORDER

Creating the Colorado Forest Health Advisory Council

Pursuant to the authority vested in the Office of the Governor of the State of Colorado, I, Bill Ritter, Jr., Governor of the State of Colorado, hereby issue this Executive Order creating the Colorado Forest Health Advisory Council.

I. Background and Purpose

There are approximately 22.6 million acres of forest land in Colorado. These forested lands provide valuable benefits such as clean water, critical wildlife habitat, scenic and recreational settings, and a variety of wood products and other economic opportunities.

Current conditions in many of these forested landscapes leave them highly vulnerable to insect and disease outbreaks, large-scale and severe wildfires, and other types of disturbance on a vast scale. These vulnerable conditions may be further exacerbated by the effects of climate change and the ongoing drought. This situation is dramatically displayed in Colorado's high country, where bark-beetle infestations have killed several hundred thousand acres of lodgepole pine and spruce-fir forests on both federal and non-federal land.

Concern for forest conditions is also particularly acute in the state's wildland-urban interface (WUI), or Red Zone, where more than 1 million Coloradans live within or adjacent to these high-risk forests. The Front Range Fuels Treatment Partnership Roundtable has identified 1.5 million acres along the front range that need treatment to protect communities from wildfire and/or restore forest health. During the record 2002 wildfire season, more than 81,000 Coloradans were evacuated from their homes. In the Hayman Fire alone, 134 families lost their homes and 433 structures were destroyed.

Research has shown that forest management activities such as thinning and prescribed use of fire, combined with the efforts of homeowners, communities, and local forest industry, can be effective in reducing the adverse ecological and economic impacts of significant disturbance events. But in order to be most effective, these activities must be coordinated and implemented across ownership boundaries and at a landscape scale.

Throughout Colorado, diverse groups have sought solutions to forest-health challenges such as increased wildfire risk, threatened water supplies, and loss of tourism dollars. The General Assembly has also become increasingly active in addressing fire risk and forest health issues.

Developing a statewide strategy for Colorado's forests would promote collaboration to prioritize efforts and action, facilitate shared expertise and focus communities and land managers on the most effective use of available resources rather than competing for limited resources.

The Western Governors' Association (WGA), a number of western states, federal agencies, counties, and stakeholders agree that broad-based, state-level advisory bodies are key in seeking solutions to forestry and wildfire issues. Rather than replace local efforts, statewide councils add value by emphasizing local priorities into comprehensive state action.

II. Mission and Scope

This Executive Order creates the Colorado Forest Health Advisory Council for the purpose of bringing together relevant state and federal agencies, local government representatives, and key stakeholders to identify short term actions that will improve Colorado's approach to forest health and to develop and implement a long term strategy for sustaining the state's vital forest resources and associated public values. Key objectives of both short and long term activities will be to facilitate fire-resilient communities, restore and maintain forest health across the state, and ensure consensus-oriented forest management that contributes to local economic sustainability, including private sector opportunities.

To that end, the Council shall:

- A. Develop a short-term action plan that outlines ways Colorado can ensure that available resources are being targeted to high priority forest health issues and landscapes in the state and that projects are being implemented quickly and collaboratively. The short term plan shall address, at least, the following:
 1. Implementation of priorities identified in Community Wildfire Protection Plans;
 2. Strategies for encouraging and supporting the establishment of Forest Improvement Districts;
 3. Coordination and expansion of economic incentives to reduce forest treatment costs, with emphasis on bioheating and renewable energy;
 4. Implementation of long-term, landscape scale stewardship projects and contracts to achieve ecological, economic and community benefits;
 5. Improved accountability for statewide forest health accomplishments; and
 6. Continuation of the Community Forest Restoration Grant Program.

- B. Develop a long-term strategy for Colorado's forests that outlines policy and management recommendations aimed at sustaining the health and resiliency of Colorado's forest resources and outlines specific actions to begin implementation. The long term strategy shall address, at least, the following:
1. A statewide vision and roadmap to protect communities from fire and restore forest health.
 2. Guiding principles for the design and implementation of restoration-based projects.
 3. A strategy for improving public understanding regarding the importance of healthy, resilient forests to the sustainability of public benefits such as clean drinking water, quality wildlife habitat, safe communities, diverse economic opportunities, and recreation and tourism values.
 4. A method for monitoring and evaluating the results of existing projects in Colorado and sharing lessons learned.
- C. The Council shall periodically, but not less frequently than annually, provide a summary of its progress to the Governor and the General Assembly. If the Council has recommendations that require legislative action, it shall make such recommendations to the Governor and the General Assembly by October 1st for action in the subsequent legislative session.

III. Membership

- A. The Council shall consist of up to twenty-four (24) members, appointed by and serving at the pleasure of the Governor. The Council shall be composed as follows:
1. The Colorado State Forester;
 2. The Executive Director of the Department of Natural Resources;
 3. The Executive Director of the Colorado Department of Local Affairs, or her designee;
 4. The Executive Director of the Colorado Department of Public Health & Environment, or his designee;
 5. The Director of the Governor's Energy Office, or his designee;

6. The Regional Forester from the United States Forest Service, Rocky Mountain Region, or his designee;
 7. The State Director of the Colorado State Office of the Bureau of Land Management, or her designee;
 8. A representative of the Colorado Municipal League;
 9. A representative of Colorado Counties, Inc.;
 10. A local emergency response representative;
 11. A representative from the Warner College of Natural Resources at Colorado State University;
 12. A representative of the Governor's Office of Policy and Initiatives;
 13. A member of the Colorado Senate, appointed in consultation with the President and Minority Leader of the Colorado Senate;
 14. A member of the Colorado House of Representatives, appointed in consultation with the Speaker of the House and the Minority Leader of the Colorado House of Representatives; and
 15. Up to ten additional members with balanced representation, and who may be from the following: Native American tribes; traditional forest products/woody biomass industry; conservation and environmental organizations; municipal water suppliers; utilities; outdoor recreation organizations; wildlife and sporting organizations; and other stakeholder entities, groups, or organizations.
- B. The Colorado State Forester and the Executive Director of the Department of Natural Resources shall serve as co-chairs of the Council.
- C. The Council may establish working groups or subcommittees from within its membership or outside its membership to assist it in its work or to address specific issues.

IV. Funding and Staffing

The Colorado State Forest Service shall provide primary staff and administrative support with assistance, as needed, from the Department of Natural Resources. Members of the Council shall serve without compensation but may, at the discretion of the co-chairs and with approval of the Office of the Governor, be reimbursed for any actual expenses incurred.

The Council shall have the power to accept money and in-kind contributions from private entities only to the extent such donations are necessary to cover its expenses. Any money contributed to the Council shall be directed to the Department of Natural Resources and deposited with the Treasurer of the State of Colorado in an account within the Department's budget.

V. Directive

The Colorado Forest Health Advisory Council is hereby created.

VI. Duration

This Executive Order shall remain in effect until modified or rescinded by future Executive Order of the Governor.

GIVEN under my hand
and the Executive Seal of the
State of Colorado, this twelfth day
of February, 2008.

Bill Ritter, Jr.
Governor