

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## GOV. RITTER GIVES COLORADO NEW TOOLS IN FIGHT TO KEEP FORESTS HEALTHY

KEYSTONE — Gov. Bill Ritter today signed into law a package of bills that gives the state new and stronger tools in the fight to keep Colorado's forests healthy against the mountain pine beetle, wildfires and other threats.

"Colorado's 22.6 million acres of forestland are critical to our clean water, our wildlife habitat, and of course, our tourism and recreation economies," Gov. Ritter said. "But our forests are at risk from the pine beetle, other insects and greater development into the 'red zone.'

"Protecting our forests will require strong public-private partnerships, strong cooperation among all levels of government, and a clear vision of how we want our forests to look in the future," Gov. Ritter added. "The bills I am signing today get us a little closer to achieving that healthy-forest vision, and they provide some actual funding and incentives to implement that vision."

**House Bill 1110** (Witwer/Kopp) creates a five-year program from 2009 to 2014 that allows landowners to deduct the actual costs of their wildfire mitigation, up to \$2,500, from their state income tax.

**HB 1269** (Gibbs/White) provides a sales-tax exemption for sales, storage and use of wood products, such as lumber, furniture, or wood chips, that use wood from beetle-kill trees. The exemption would run through July 1, 2014. The bill also provides cities and counties the option of enacting similar sales-tax exemptions.

**HB 1318** (Lundberg/Taylor) creates the voluntary Beetle Mitigation Fund to be administered by the Colorado State Forest Service to mitigate and remove beetle-infested trees from state-owned land. The public will be able to donate to the fund online.

**Senate Bill 71** (Gibbs/Scanlan) extends a one-year, forest-restoration pilot program from 2007 through 2012. It provides \$1 million a year help communities implement forest treatment projects to reduce wildfire fuels and protect Colorado's watersheds. In 2007, the pilot funded 12 different forest restoration projects around the state.

"Colorado's forests and watersheds are among our most critical resources and we must do all we can to protect them," said Sen. Dan Gibbs. "It's heartbreaking to see the extent of the devastation in our mountain forests. With this bill, we're tackling this crisis head-on. Removing all that dead timber will greatly reduce the threat of catastrophic wildfires and help protect our forests, our water and our way of life."

“We cannot stop the bark beetle epidemic. But we can and must take steps to address the resulting devastation,” said Rep. Christine Scanlan.

**SB 221** (Gibbs & Romer/Scanlan & White) authorizes the Colorado Water Resources and Power Development Authority to issue up to \$50 million in bonds to fund watershed protection and forest health projects.

**HB 1241** (Scanlan/Schwartz) changes the name of the current “Colorado Watershed Protection Fund” state tax checkoff to the “Healthy Rivers Fund” and extends the checkoff through 2010.

“By encouraging Coloradans to donate to this fund, we're supporting the essential work our local communities undertake to protect our rivers and watersheds. I really do believe this small change will make a huge difference,” said Sen. Gail Schwartz.

For a complete list of 2008 legislation Gov. Ritter has signed into law, [click here](#) or visit [www.colorado.gov/governor](http://www.colorado.gov/governor).

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