

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

February 25, 2009

The Honorable Ken Salazar
Secretary, U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street, NW
Washington, DC 20240

The Honorable Tom Vilsack
Secretary, U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave., SW
Washington, DC 20250

The Honorable Dr. Steven Chu
Secretary, U.S. Department of Energy
1000 Independence Ave., SW
Washington, DC 20585

The Honorable Janet Napolitano
Secretary, U.S. Department of Homeland
Security
Washington, DC 20528

Dear Secretaries Salazar, Vilsack, Chu, and Napolitano:

We are writing to urge your agencies to do what they can to help us address the serious bark beetle infestation affecting our forests in Colorado—an infestation that impacts the state's economy, environment and water supplies. Two million acres of Colorado's high-elevation lodgepole pine forests are dead or dying. Municipal and county governments of the region and the state of Colorado are extremely concerned about the hazards of wildfire and falling trees to the health and safety of citizens, their homes and communities, vital public infrastructure such as power lines, and critical water supplies.

Now that the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) has been signed into law, we urge your agencies to seriously consider applying those funds to address the threats of wildfire and falling dead trees. In northern Colorado, the Forest Service alone has NEPA-ready projects valued at \$57.4 million ready to go if and when money is made available through the ARRA. (Over ninety percent of the forests in northern Colorado are public lands, almost all managed by the U.S. Forest Service; The Bureau of Land Management and the National Park Service also manage some lands.) These projects will create jobs, produce renewable energy from the removal of insect-killed trees, and protect watersheds that provide water to ten states.

In the five-county epicenter of the dead and dying forests there are:

- 12 incorporated municipalities located within the forest and 11 more adjacent to the forest.
- 28 incorporated municipalities that derive their primary source of drinking water from creeks flowing through dead and dying forests.
- 2,000 miles of roadways—many of which would be needed in the event of an evacuation—that are in jeopardy due to dead standing trees in the right-of-way.
- 1,500 miles of recreational trails on three national forests that are in jeopardy of closure due to falling dead trees.
- 21,455 acres of national forest developed recreation sites that are in jeopardy of closure due to falling tree hazards.

Page Two

- World-class ski resorts that must cope with safety and aesthetic issues presented by dead trees on slopes.
- More than 2,000 miles of national forest grazing fences, which are the responsibility of the rancher permittee, that are in jeopardy due to falling trees.
- 52 emergency communications sites that are in jeopardy.
- 633 miles of electrical transmission lines at risk from falling trees and that will not withstand a wildfire.
- 1,314 miles of electrical distribution lines at risk from falling trees and that will not withstand a wildfire.

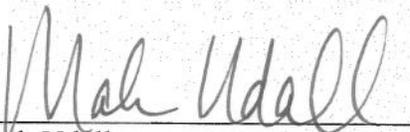
In addition, the Colorado River rises and flows through these forests, supplying the metropolitan areas of Denver, Las Vegas, Phoenix, and Southern California. Major electrical transmission lines that feed the Western Grid (which serves the entire western United States) run directly through the heart of these forests.

We, the members of Colorado's congressional delegation, strongly urge you to:

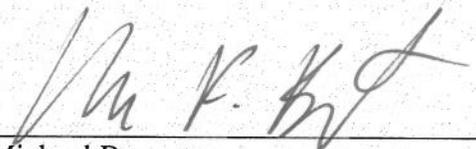
- Immediately assess the hazards posed to the resources managed by your departments by this critical situation.
- Meet with affected municipal and county governments and stakeholders to assess the threats posed by this critical situation to their citizens, public infrastructure and water supplies.
- Develop budget proposals to effectively mitigate the hazards posed.
- Develop priority action plans to expedite the hazard mitigation projects.
- Report the assessment, proposed budgets, and proposed action plans to the Governor of the State of Colorado and the Colorado Congressional delegation.
- Begin the implementation of the priority action plans within the current fiscal year.

Jobs created in the public and private sectors to respond to the enormous task of implementing hazard mitigation projects will provide significant stimulus to our state and national economy. We cannot overstate the threat to communities and our fellow Coloradans' way of life posed by these dead and dying federal forests. We urge you take decisive actions within your authorities to avert potential disaster.

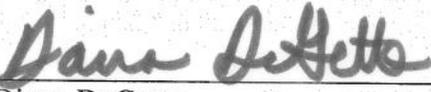
Sincerely,

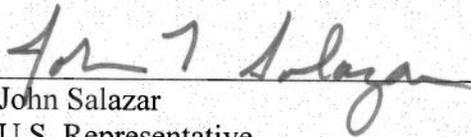


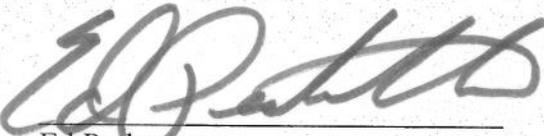
Mark Udall
U.S. Senator

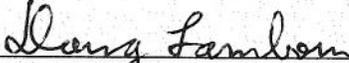


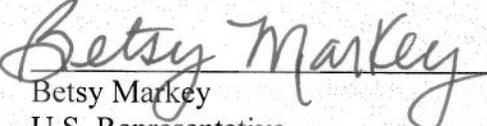
Michael Bennet
U.S. Senator

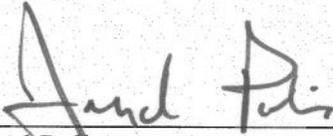

Diana DeGette
U.S. Representative

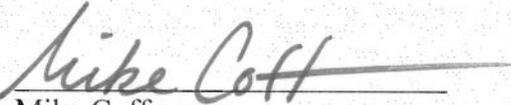

John Salazar
U.S. Representative


Ed Perlmutter
U.S. Representative


Doug Lamborn
U.S. Representative


Betsy Markey
U.S. Representative


Jared Polis
U.S. Representative


Mike Coffman
U.S. Representative