

# Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

October 17, 2023

The Honorable Tom Vilsack  
Secretary  
U.S. Department of Agriculture  
1400 Independence Avenue SW  
Washington, D.C. 20250

The Honorable Randy Moore  
Chief  
U.S. Forest Service  
1400 Independence Avenue SW  
Washington, D.C. 20250

Dear Secretary Vilsack and Chief Moore:

Thank you for your leadership as you continue to implement the provisions of the *Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA)* and *Inflation Reduction Act (IRA)*, work to reduce wildfire risk, and protect forest health throughout our nation. We write to follow up on our November 2022 letter and request that you prioritize additional funding opportunities in Colorado's 11 national forests, which serve as the headwaters for rivers and streams that extend far beyond our state's boundaries.

Colorado has experienced numerous devastating wildfires over the past several years, including the East Troublesome and Cameron Peak fires. Many recovering communities are still working to address the lingering watershed devastation. We are grateful for your continued partnership with our offices, the State of Colorado, and affected communities on these recovery efforts, and encourage you to continue to help us secure resources for post-fire recovery and long-term rehabilitation to stabilize watersheds following these devastating megafires.

We also commend your agencies for the investments across the West as part of the Wildfire Crisis Strategy. We were pleased to see Colorado's Front Range landscape included as one of the initial Wildfire Crisis Strategy landscape investments, and appreciate the funding to establish firebreaks in several of Colorado's National Forests. However, given the immense wildfire risk in communities across our state, we request additional information about how the Forest Service plans to address continued forest health needs outside of the Priority Fireshed areas, including on Colorado's Western Slope.

We appreciate your engagement with our offices and request that you continue to provide us with regular updates about the Forest Service's *IIJA* and *IRA* implementation, including the annual project selection process. As current projects are underway, we ask you to provide information on the Forest Service's plans to monitor project success, with details on the development of outcome-based performance metrics. Finally, we would welcome additional information about how the Forest Service plans to leverage regular appropriations to address forestry needs, particularly in areas outside of the Priority Firesheds.


We encourage you to consider the importance of Colorado's forests as headwaters not just for our communities, but for cities and towns in the 18 other states that rely on the rivers that originate in Colorado. We implore you to prioritize projects that protect the Upper Colorado River Basin headwaters, much of which falls within Colorado's national forests. Forty million people, 30 Tribal nations, and 5.5 million agricultural acres rely on the Colorado River. Watershed protection for the Colorado River and its tributaries is essential for the West's

communities, ecosystems, and economies, particularly as we face climate change-driven aridification and heightened wildfire risk.

When we invest in forest health, we invest in the health of watersheds—which are critically important to communities across Colorado and the West. We understand the daunting challenges facing the Forest Service as you work to address forest and watershed health across our nation, and we stand ready to assist you in achieving these goals.

Thank you for your consideration, and we look forward to continuing to work with you to strengthen our nation’s forest health.

Sincerely,



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Joe Neguse  
Member of Congress



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Michael F. Bennet  
United States Senator



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John Hickenlooper  
United States Senator

cc: Regional Forester Frank Beum, Rocky Mountain Region