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Congress of the United States  
House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515-0606

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October 21, 2014

The Honorable Barack Obama  
President  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Ave. NW  
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President,

Colorado is a state blessed with many natural resources, but some of the most important are our forest lands and watersheds. These are vital resources for the economy and quality of life for many of our families and businesses. However, Colorado's forests are in danger due to threats from disease and wildfire. We must take all necessary steps to protect our forests and our watersheds on public lands from catastrophic wildfires and invasive species. Proper forest management practices are crucial to preserving both our environment and our economies.

The Western Watershed Enhancement Partnership is working to do both. The Partnership was formed last year when the Departments of Agriculture and Interior established a framework to partner with local entities to reduce the risks of wildfire upon Western communities and their water supplies. In July 2014, under this arrangement, the Departments of Agriculture and Interior announced \$187,500 to Colorado in order to fund forestry work around the Colorado-Big Thompson and Fryingpan-Arkansas projects. These projects use diversions, tunnels, pipes, dams and reservoirs to carry water under the Continental Divide to the Front Range of Colorado. The funding will be used to thin forests and clear hazardous fuels around a reservoir above Estes Park and for forest thinning around Turquoise Reservoir and the water collection system in the surrounding watershed. This will help to prevent and mitigate the devastating effects that future fires can have on our water resources and the communities that depend upon them.

The crippling effects of massive wildfires to Colorado cannot be overstated. The Front Range of Colorado's municipal water supplies suffered greatly as a result of flooding, erosion and sediment deposition after the 1996 Buffalo Creek Fire, the 2000 Bobcat Fire, the 2002 Hayman and Schoonover fires, and the 2012 Waldo Canyon fire. The Buffalo Creek fire and the subsequent debris flows from flash floods deposited mud, ash and decomposed granite in Strontia Springs Reservoir, requiring significant rehabilitation efforts. Moreover, the storage capacity of the Reservoir was reduced by 15 percent in the months following the fire. The Hayman Fire burned 138,000 acres of forest, and destroyed 133 homes and 466 outbuildings at an estimated cost of \$238 million. The Waldo Canyon fire burned the watershed above Colorado Springs, resulting in the death of two individuals, the loss of 346 homes, over \$450 million in

insurance claims, and significant damage – as a result of post-fire storms – to utility infrastructure. If we are to avoid more of these devastating wildfires, more funding for wildfire prevention is needed.

In light of the Partnership's early successes – and the grave threat posed by future wildfires – I urge you to double the amount of funding available for this program for the Fiscal Year 2016. Doing so will bolster the Forest Service and the Department of the Interior's abilities to protect our natural resources and our communities. However, given the current fiscal and budget realities, I also request that this be accomplished through re-allocation of current budget resources so as not to increase the overall federal deficit.

Thank you for your time and consideration of this important issue.

Sincerely,



Mike Coffman  
Member of Congress