Colorado Elected Officials: Please Engage with Peer-Reviewed Science on "Wildfire Fuel Reduction" Logging Projects

We, the undersigned Colorado environmental and conservation organizations, are concerned about current and proposed "wildfire fuel reduction" logging projects across millions of acres of Colorado's carbon-storing forests at the federal, state, county, and municipal level. [1]

Wildfire is, of course, a very real concern in our state and throughout the West. We believe urgent action should be taken to protect communities through scientifically demonstrated home hardening measures such as installing non-flammable roofs, screening vents, and maintaining defensible space (based upon a given home's ignition characteristics), with 100 feet around structures as an outside limit. [2] We'd like to see this home hardening focused on underserved communities, a concern raised by the U.S. Forest Service.

However, the vast majority of taxpayer dollars slated for wildfire protection are instead funding logging in public forests, often in the backcountry miles from the nearest home. [3] While some of this involves "thinning" smaller-diameter trees, much of it involves cutting larger, fire-resistant trees, including mature and old-growth, often by clearcutting. [4] For instance, the Forest Service is targeting 3.5 million acres in the Front Range alone with logging in the Arapaho, Roosevelt, Pike, and San Isabel National Forests, while Jefferson County Open Space claims it is "feasible" to log up to 25,000 acres across 32 public parks.

While a large and growing body of peer-reviewed science questions the reasoning for and effectiveness of "wildfire fuel reduction" logging, these studies are almost entirely ignored by government agencies (such as the U.S. Forest Service, Colorado State Forest Service, and city and county Parks and Open Space and foresters) and elected officials promoting these projects. [5] Further, a controversial "emergency action" under Section 40807 of the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act of 2021 now allows the Forest Service to bypass certain legal challenges from environmental advocates. [6]

One of Colorado's simplest, cheapest, and most effective carbon sequestration and storage strategies to slow climate change is to protect our public forests. [7] In fact, studies show that even high-severity wildfire only releases an average of 1-2 percent of tree carbon, whereas conversion to lumber releases 66 percent upon logging and processing, and pile burning can release even more. Meanwhile, burning wood for "biomass" energy releases nearly all carbon except for what remains in the ash. [8][9][10]

Which is why we're asking you to please engage with peer-reviewed studies from wildfire scientists, including from CU Boulder, as well as local environmental and conservation groups,

so together we can find the most effective strategies for protecting Colorado's communities from wildfire and our carbon-storing forests from unnecessary logging. [11]

Sincerely,

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