

Questions about Ballot Measure to Fund More "Fuel Reduction" on Public Lands

Dear Conservation Colorado and Western Resource Advocates,

We, the undersigned Colorado conservation and environmental groups, are aware of a state ballot measure your organizations are currently supporting which, if passed, would direct sales tax on sporting goods into a newly established “Conserve and Protect Colorado’s Water, Land, and Forests Fund.”

According to the [ballot language](#), this fund would finance the Colorado State Forest Service and the Colorado Department of Natural Resources to “protect communities and water by reducing the risk of wildfire.”

Under the initiative, 47.5% of the tax on sporting goods would go to a new “Colorado Wildfire Protection and Water Fund,” 47.5% to the Great Outdoors Colorado (GOCO) program, and 2.5% each to the Outdoor Equity Grant Program and the Outdoor Recreation Economic Development Cash Fund.

Money transferred to the Colorado Wildfire Protection and Water Fund would be disbursed—in most cases at the discretion of the Colorado State Forest Service and the Colorado Department of Natural Resources—to four other funds to finance “wildfire mitigation” efforts, primarily in the form of landscape-wide tree cutting and removal, aka “fuel reduction” (as well as a small percentage to the Colorado Water Conservation Board Construction Fund).

The funding would also be used to “support utilization and marketing of wood products,” to “provide loans to forest products businesses,” and for forest biomass energy [see [here](#) for full breakdown of funding].

We, too, share your organizations’ concerns with protecting Colorado communities and infrastructure from wildfire. As you know, the body of peer-reviewed science on [home hardening](#) and defensible space immediately around structures is nearly unanimous in terms of its high level of effectiveness.

Meanwhile, [the science](#) on the efficacy of landscape-level “fuel reduction” efforts that this initiative would mostly fund is complex, conflicting, and ever-evolving.

What’s more, the politics surrounding this issue of wildfire and forests on public lands is extremely controversial. This includes but is not limited to: the rollback of the federal “Roadless Rule”; the proposed “Fix Our Forests” Act which would impact the Endangered Species Act and National Environmental Policy Act; the Trump administration’s executive order for an “immediate expansion of American timber production”; and the subsequent emergency authorization designation to fast track “fuel reduction” across up to 112 million acres of National Forests.

It's important to remember that any funding from this initiative would be in addition to tens of millions of federal, state, and county taxpayer dollars currently carrying out "wildfire fuel reduction" tree removal on public lands in Colorado (including projects over hundreds of thousands of acres). Indeed, over the last few years such tree cutting has rapidly expanded and, if trends continue, could encompass 3.5 million acres in the Front Range alone, according to the U.S. Forest Service's "[Wildfire Crisis Strategy](#)."

To that end, we have several questions we're hoping you can please answer so we, members of the Colorado environmental and conservation community, can make the most informed decision for how to evaluate this ballot measure.

Our questions are as follows. Would the ballot measure:

1. Route any funding towards home hardening and/or defensible space immediately around homes (measures shown to be very effective in protecting structures)?
2. Require any surveys for wildlife, watersheds, soil, and wind prior to wildfire mitigation efforts?
3. Put any regulations in place that would limit the scale and/or scope of project implementation?
4. Allow or disallow clearcutting (aka "patch cutting," "regeneration harvest," etc.)?
5. Allow or disallow cutting of mature and/or old-growth trees?
6. Allow or disallow cutting in threatened or endangered species habitat?
7. Allow or disallow cutting in Colorado Roadless Areas?
8. Allow or disallow cutting in upper montane and subalpine forests, which have a longer fire return interval?
9. Allow or disallow new permanent and/or temporary road construction?
10. Encourage or disallow increased community engagement for planning any forest projects?
11. Invite the participation of local indigenous peoples and tribes?
12. Address any potential conflicts of interest within the Colorado State Forest Service, which, according to the initiative both "promotes forest health and forest restoration projects" (i.e. "fuel reduction" tree removal) while it "encourages the use of wood for traditional forest products and biomass energy"?

Thank you,

Rocky Smith, Forest Management Consultant

Scott Severs, Boulder County Audubon Society

Tom Weis, Climate Crisis Solutions

Iayana T Rael, Culture In Place

Dave Hallock, Earthwork Conservation Planning

Josh Schlossberg, Eco-Integrity Alliance

Evergreen Audubon

Friends of Browns Canyon

Betina Mattesen, High Country Forest Watch

The Lorax Forest Defenders

Lovely Landscapes & Gardens - Mountain Division

Teagen Blakey, Magnolia Forest Group

Bonnie Sundance, Our Sacred Earth

Will Kimzey, Peak to Peak Forest Alliance

Tom Sobal, Quiet Use Coalition

Christine Canaly, San Luis Valley Ecosystem Council

Save Boulder Parks and Trails

Sheep Mountain Alliance

Western Colorado Alliance

Western Watersheds Project

WildEarth Guardians