



March 10, 2015

The Honorable Rob Bishop, Chairman
The Honorable Raul Grijalva, Ranking Member
House Committee on Natural Resources
1324 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

RE: Healthy Forest Management and Wildfire Prevention Act of 2015

Dear Chairman Bishop and Ranking Member Grijalva:

Associated Governments of Northwest Colorado (AGNC) representing five counties and multiple communities in Northwest Colorado supports passage of the Healthy Forest Management and Wildfire Prevention Act of 2015. Approximately 70% of the land in these counties are under federal management and AGNC members support policies that allow local land managers, local governments and policy makers more input in managing these public lands for the health, safety and welfare of our citizens.

The forests in Northwest Colorado, indeed throughout Western Colorado, are deteriorating as they are impacted by factors such as beetle infestation, lack of age diversity, overgrowth and drought. The hazardous fuel load in the forests under federal oversight in Colorado is extreme and when wildfire strikes, the result is hundreds of miles of burned forests, private property losses, as well as significant loss of wildlife and watershed damage. The cost of suppressing wildfire and clean-up is substantially more expensive than proactive forest management and it makes sense that our limited resources be used in the most efficient manner possible by improving forest health throughout the West.

AGNC members believe it is time local and state governments have a greater voice in the management of the public lands in Western Colorado and throughout the nation. Local county commissioners and state Governors should have the flexibility to work with local public land managers to designate high-risk areas in the National Forests and on BLM lands, develop emergency hazardous fuels reduction projects and to act quickly in implementing those strategies. The deterioration of our National Forests and lands managed by the BLM not only places local communities and citizens in a dangerous situation, it negatively impacts the health of wildlife in the area, agricultural interests that depend on properly managed lands for supplemental grazing, the tourism economy and clean water sheds for our communities.

The Healthy Forest Management and Wildfire Prevention Act passed through the House of Representatives twice in the 113th Congress. AGNC urges your support for the passage of the Healthy Forest Management and Wildfire Prevention Act of 2015 in the 114th Congress. Our communities deserve to have the peace of mind that their homes and livelihoods will not be destroyed due to circumstances that can be addressed and mitigated in a proactive fashion.

Thank you for your consideration of our comments on this matter. Please contact us if AGNC can be of assistance in moving this critical legislation forward.

Sincerely,



Mike Samson
Chairman



Jeff Eskelson
Vice-Chairman



Martin Chazen
Treasurer

Copies to: Governor Hickenlooper