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Deputy Secretary Connor Announces Additional Funding for Colorado Projects Designed to Reduce Risk to Local Water Supplies from Wildland Fires

Western Watershed Enhancement Partnership Part of President Obama's Climate Action Plan

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LOVELAND, Colo. — As part of President Obama's [Climate Action Plan](#) to reduce carbon pollution while better preparing the nation for the impacts of

climate, like longer, hotter and drier wildfire seasons, Deputy Secretary of the Interior Michael Connor today visited northern Colorado to see firsthand the efforts to protect the Colorado-Big Thompson Project water system, and announce an additional \$187,500 for Colorado-area projects. His visit comes one year after [a key partnership was announced](#) to protect the important watershed area from the effects of wildfire. The area has experienced several wildland fires in the past few years, including the destructive High Park Fire in June 2012.

"A year ago this month, Secretary of the Interior Sally Jewell and Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack came to Colorado to sign the Western Watershed Enhancement Partnership Memorandum of Understanding," said Deputy Secretary Connor. "The progress made here on the ground since then to reduce the presence of hazardous fuels and proactively protect the water supply sets a strong example for the West when it comes to establishing effective partnerships and protecting watersheds in the face of increasingly destructive wildfire seasons."

The funds announced today come in addition to the \$152,000 Interior's Bureau of Reclamation has already committed to agreements with the United States Forest Service for work associated with the Western Watershed Enhancement Program in Colorado.

The Colorado-Big Thompson Headwaters Partnership is a pilot project; in July 2013, it kicked off the [Western Watershed Enhancement Partnership](#), which enables the Department of the Interior and the Department of Agriculture to partner with local water users to identify and mitigate risks of wildfire to parts of our nation's water supply, irrigation and hydroelectric facilities. Flows of sediment, debris and ash into streams and rivers after wildfires can damage water quality and often require millions of dollars to repair damage to habitat, reservoirs and facilities.

Interior-USDA teamwork is critical because many watersheds originate on USDA forest lands across the West. More than 40 dams and related facilities managed

by Interior's Bureau of Reclamation are located on or downstream from Forest Service lands. Reclamation plans to ramp up its investment in the Western Watershed Enhancement Partnership in order to accelerate treatments and reduce fire risk to key water supply watersheds and infrastructure in northern Colorado. Under the partnership, that work will be executed by the USFS and coordinated with local partners.

During the course of his visit, Connor met with representatives of the Bureau of Reclamation, U.S. Forest Service, Colorado State Forest Service and Northern Colorado Water Conservancy District, all of whom are partners in the Colorado-Big Thompson Headwaters Partnership, one of six pilot programs under the MOU.

Working together, the partners have proactively disposed of beetle-killed pine trees around Granby Reservoir on the West Slope and installed sediment, debris and erosion control for post-fire mitigation around Horsetooth Reservoir on the East Slope.

The West Slope area of the Continental Divide suffered a mountain-pine-beetle epidemic that left hundreds of thousands of acres of dead and dying trees in the Colorado-Big Thompson watershed. On the East Slope, a series of wildland fires over the past ten years has created burn scars in the Colorado-Big Thompson watersheds.

Increased warming, drought and insect outbreaks—all caused by or linked to climate change—have increased wildfires and impacts to people and ecosystems in the West. Fire models project more wildfire and increased risks to communities across extensive areas. Coordinated efforts with federal, state and local entities will be critical to enhanced risk reduction and mitigation going forward.

The Colorado Big-Thompson water system provides water to 800,000 people within eight counties (Boulder, Broomfield, Larimer, Logan, Morgan, Sedgwick, Washington and Weld) and to more than 650,000 acres of agricultural land. It

also generates enough electricity to power 58,300 homes annually.

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