



December 3, 2024

To Whom It May Concern,

This letter is intended to provide strong support of the Lower North-South Vegetation Management Project proposed by the USFS South Platte Ranger District. As a partner land management agency working to promote conservation efforts primarily on private lands in close proximity to the Lower North-South project area, Jefferson Conservation District is pleased to provide this letter. The proposed project will provide many benefits to the local community, economy, and ecosystem, including protection of critical natural resources, lessened risk of catastrophic wildfire impacts, and enhancement of wildlife habitat.

The Need for Forest Management

Forests across the world are dynamic, meaning that a 'forest type' reflects a rich history of life affected by changing landscapes and climates. Colorado's lower elevation forests (6,500 - 9,500 feet) historically experienced frequently occurring wildfires running through grassy openings between small groups of trees. Land uses such as grazing cattle, mining, and logging began to interrupt normal wildfire events starting around 1860, and forest function was subsequently altered further when we began to systematically extinguish wildfires in the early 1900s. The 'single-use' approach to land management from those who came before us has effectively restricted our forests from functioning in normal ways, which is resulting in dense tree cover across the landscape and devastating effects when wildfire occurs.

Vegetation management projects such as the proposed Lower North-South proposal help to restore some of the innate resiliency to our forests when wildfire occurs, which is achieved by taking our understanding of historical forest structure and applying it to the dense forests we have today. Not only is this approach beneficial for reducing wildfire intensity, it also creates a landscape that is more resilient to natural pests and pathogens. Lowering wildfire intensity improves post-fire soil health, water retention/filtration capacities, herbaceous plant recovery, and tree germination rates, all of which are critical in providing clean air and water. The proposal itself is well thought out, relying upon a wealth of local knowledge and research that has been built up over the past several decades. The varying management strategies for forest types found in

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the proposed project area are appropriate to the landscape and will serve to enhance forest function and resiliency.

Since prescribed fire has been difficult to implement along the Southern Front Range in the last decade, JCD is particularly pleased to see the Lower North-South proposal incorporate the use of prescribed fire to remove biomass and maintain mechanical forest treatments both in the form of pile burning as well as broadcast burning. This will be instrumental not only to the Lower North-South project, but to other local agencies (including Jefferson Conservation District) who would benefit from the use of prescribed fire to maintain and enhance mechanical forest treatments in the future.

It is difficult to understate the importance of the proposal to the local ecosystem, forest community, nearby residents, and downstream water users who rely upon this basin for clean drinking water. Entire landscapes, hundreds of thousands of acres, are required to provide ecosystem services that humans rely upon. Without support from large land management agencies such as the USFS, protecting these ecosystem services on a landscape-scale is impossible. Therefore, this project is a vital step towards doing so.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Matt McLemore", written in a cursive style.

Matt McLemore
Forest Program Manager
Jefferson Conservation District

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