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First name: Alan
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Organization: Denver Water
Title:
Comments: Dear Ms. Wyndham,

We are writing on behalf of Denver Water to convey our support for the forest management and wildfire mitigation goals described in the Draft Environmental Assessment (EA) for the Lower North-South Vegetation Management Plan on the Pike National Forest.

Denver Water is Colorado's oldest and largest water utility, supplying safe, reliable drinking water to 1.5 million people living in the City and County of Denver and the surrounding suburbs. Wildfire is the primary risk to Denver Water's raw water supply. We collect raw water from a collection system that covers approximately 4,000 square miles, or 2.5 million acres. About half of this collection system is within forested, fire-adapted ecosystems.

Denver Water supports the proposed actions within the EA to mitigate this perennial risk and endorses the Management Plan's purpose of restoring fire-adapted vegetation communities, creating wildfire resilient landscapes and improving watershed conditions. Specifically, introducing fire on a minimum of 70% of maintenance burning and 50% to 70% of broadcast burning unit acres, as well as improving U.S. Forest Service system roads, will significantly improve forest and watershed health. Without these actions, high-intensity wildfire could significantly impact Denver Water's raw water supply by increasing erosion, runoff and debris flows. Moving forward with these proposed actions is important to protect Denver Water's watersheds and raw water quality.

As climate change exacerbates the frequency and severity of wildfire, we commend the U.S. Forest Service for proposing proactive steps to mitigate this growing risk. The EA rightly highlights the consequences of inaction, stating that "watersheds that supply water for the Cities of Denver and Aurora would remain susceptible to high intensity wildfires that could negatively affect the ability of those watershed to provide high quality drinking water." This aligns with Denver Water's perspective, and we support the proposed actions outlined in the Management Plan.

Please contact us with any questions or concerns.

Sincerely,

Alan Salazar
CEO/Manager, Denver Water

Madelene McDonald
Watershed Scientist, Denver Water