

Data Submitted (UTC 11): 7/8/2022 3:13:43 AM

First name: Kimberly

Last name: Mihelich

Organization: Northern Colorado Water Conservancy District

Title: Source Water Protection Specialist

Comments: Northern Colorado Water Conservancy District (Northern Water) strongly supports the St. Vrain Forest Health Project that is being planned on national forest system lands. The work proposed in this project (tree thinning, creating openings and meadows, pile burning, and prescribed fires) will improve forest health and resiliency on a broad, landscape scale and is being planned collaboratively with a diverse set of partners. This work is essential since large wildfires are becoming increasingly more frequent. These types of forest health projects minimize wildfire impacts to source watersheds and downstream communities and values at risk.

Northern Water and the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation jointly operate and maintain the federally-owned Colorado-Big Thompson Project (C-BT) which collects water west of the Continental Divide for delivery to over one million people and 615,000 irrigated acres in Northeastern Colorado for agricultural, municipal, domestic and industrial purposes. Northern Water works with numerous partners on both sides of the divide to support forest health activities that will protect C-BT water supplies and spends approximately \$475,000 annually on similar projects within Colorado River and Big Thompson watersheds. The St. Vrain Forest Health Project shares Northern Water's philosophy of collaborative, landscape-scale work that can help to improve or maintain water security. The St. Vrain Forest Health Project Area includes a portion of C-BT Project infrastructure and implementation of the proposed project will help protect values of critical importance to Northern Water.

Additionally, Northern Water has been experiencing the effects of wildfire firsthand. The East Troublesome Fire burned a significant portion of its collections area on the West Slope in the fall of 2020 and is currently dealing with the aftermath of watershed recovery. Projects such as the St. Vrain Forest Health Project are vital for preventing and mitigating the risks from devastating wildfires such as those caused by East Troublesome.