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Comments: The Colorado Chapter of The Nature Conservancy appreciates the opportunity to comment on the U.S. Forest Service's St. Vrain Forest Health Project - Preliminary Environmental Assessment. We are supportive of the project and its core goal of promoting a "healthy and resilient watershed that can sustain wildfire and other natural disturbances while protecting communities, keeping water supplies clean and reliable, and supporting diverse native plants and wildlife for current and future generations."

We are pleased to see that the U.S. Forest Service collaborated with a diverse group of stakeholders prior to scoping and used input and information from the St. Vrain Forest Health Partnership in its development of the Proposed Action. We also support the inclusion of fire as a restoration tool, use of Potential Operational Delineations (PODs) as a planning framework, monitoring and adaptive management processes, climate change considerations, and emphasis on maintaining and conserving biodiverse ecosystems that provide diverse site characteristics across the landscape. We are glad to see all of these elements included in the Proposed Action.

Our recommendations include:

*The Quantitative Wildfire Risk Assessment - used to guide treatment prioritization - should be periodically updated, with stakeholder involvement, to reflect changing conditions on the ground as treatments are implemented and as the planning area is affected by natural disturbances such as wildfire.

*Communications, outreach, and collaboration - Keeping the public and collaborative partners engaged and aware of project activities is important in building community trust and support, and we encourage regular communications, especially as management actions are being implemented. The story map developed for the project is an effective means of communicating information such as project goals and outcomes, and we encourage its continued use, along with regular updates, through the life of the project.

*Commitment to monitoring and adaptive management - We are glad to see an annual collaborative process outlined for treatment prioritization and implementation, and we encourage the use of monitoring data in informing project placement and prescription development to ensure project goals are being met over the long term.

Sincerely,

Rob Addington

Forest Program Director

The Nature Conservancy, Colorado