

Colorado State Forest Service
HB09-1199 — Colorado Healthy Forests and Vibrant Communities Act of 2009



Summary

The Colorado Healthy Forests and Vibrant Communities Act of 2009 increases efforts to address wildfire risk and provides resources to the Colorado State Forest Service (CSFS) to augment its technical outreach capabilities.

The bill requires the CSFS to collaborate with local governments, fire districts, and law enforcement bodies to develop Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP) standards.

It provides loans and grants for market-based and forest-treatment solutions to reduce wildfire risk.

HB09-1199 also provides funding for an existing training program offered by the Division of Fire Safety in the Department of Public Safety.

Resource management needs and requests for services from the public currently exceed the capacity of CSFS staffing. This legislation recognizes the resource needs of increased forest management and protection, and the additional capacity required of CSFS to address those needs.

Talking Points

- The Healthy Forests and Vibrant Communities Act recognizes the value of Colorado's forests and the impact they have on Colorado's economy, its infrastructure, water and air, wildlife, and quality of life.
- It reflects the vision and guiding principles developed by the Colorado Forest Health Advisory Council and builds on the research and recommendations of the General Assembly's 2008 Wildland Urban Interface Interim Committee.
- HB09-1199 provides the resources to address needs at both the forest health and community protection levels, and at the CSFS technical assistance capacity level. These needs are complementary.

- The Colorado Healthy Forests and Vibrant Communities Act of 2009 is a comprehensive approach that strengthens Colorado's forests and communities by:
 - increasing community and firefighter planning and preparedness for wildfire;
 - reduces associated risks to people, homes, community infrastructure, and local economies;
 - restores more resilient conditions in forested watersheds for the benefit of people and wildlife;
 - strengthens local economic opportunities through incentives for forest-based businesses; and
 - enhances outreach and technical assistance resources.
- HB09-1199 balances the social, ecological, and economic components of effective forest management and protection.
- The resources provided through this legislation will assist in filling critical gaps and leverage other available federal, state, and local funds so that the state's highest priorities for forest management are accomplished at a meaningful scale and in an effective timeframe.
- The Healthy Forests and Vibrant Communities Act of 2009 calls on the Colorado State Forest Service to implement the elements of the Act.
- The Colorado State Forest Service has years of experience in developing and implementing forest management plans.
- The Colorado State Forest Service has years of experience in administering landowner incentive programs.
- This bill would allow state funds to be leveraged against federal funds and landowner funds, thereby increasing the number of treated acres.
- The Colorado State Forest Service would provide consistency across state and federal mitigation grant programs, and assure best management practices are met, standards are upheld, and program administration is efficient.
- The CSFS employs its vast experience to collaborate with partners, and uses the most appropriate resources available to prioritize and direct program activities. These include, but are not limited to the Governor's Forest Health Advisory Council, annual forest health reports, wildfire risk assessments, statewide forest health assessment, Front Range Fuels Treatment Partnership strategy, Front Range Roundtable recommendations, Colorado Bark Beetle Cooperative recommendations, and Community Wildfire Protection Plans.

Additional Talking Points

- The challenges to Colorado's forests are significant.
- Forest insect and disease epidemics, wildfire, and pressure from increasing development in the wildland-urban interface have caused dramatic changes in Colorado's forests.
- These changes will continue to impact the benefits our forests provide, including:
 - clean water for our farms, ranches, and communities
 - clean air
 - diverse wildlife habitat
 - aesthetics
 - communities that depend on healthy forests for their livelihood
- Forest changes are evident throughout our landscape:
 - approximately 1.5 million forested acres along the Front Range require treatment to reduce the risks of catastrophic wildfire or restore forests
 - approximately 2 million acres of mature lodgepole pine have been infested by mountain pine beetle
 - growth in the wildland-urban interface is projected to increase by 300 percent in the next two decades
 - the number of large, severe wildfires is on the rise. In 2008, 1,105 fires burned 153,952 acres, destroyed 28 homes/structures, and took the lives of three firefighters.
- The need for decisive action is clear, and Colorado is uniquely positioned to address these challenges through consensus, collaboration, and political resolve.
- HB09-1199 provides a step forward to enhance the condition of Colorado's forests and protect resources, citizens, and communities.
- The Colorado State Forest Service is committed to **Community Planning and Preparedness**. The CSFS has worked with more than 100 communities to develop Community Wildfire Protection Plans throughout Colorado; to date, 113 plans have been developed, and many are in various stages of implementation. These numbers continue to grow. HB09-1199 will allow the CSFS to increase support to additional communities to help them develop and implement plans.
- HB09-1199 also will help the CSFS ensure that state firefighting operations and personnel are functioning as effectively as possible.
- HB09-1199 will enhance the CSFS' ability to conduct annual aerial surveys to assess forest condition, identify emerging and existing insect and disease epidemics, and make timely management decisions.
- **Community Wildfire Risk Mitigation** is a major program emphasis for the Colorado State Forest Service. Through this initiative, and our continued participation in the Front Range Fuels Treatment Partnership and the Colorado Bark Beetle Cooperative, we can expand our mitigation efforts through cost-share grant programs for landowners and communities.

- HB09-1199 will enhance **Community Watershed Restoration** efforts and continue support for SB-71, Community Forest and Watershed Restoration grants, which will allow the CSFS to provide additional resources for landowners and communities, prioritize implementation of CWPPs, and expand our program capacity at the field level.
- HB09-1199 also encourages the CSFS to continue working collaboratively with landowners, local government, and others to provide training and technical assistance in support of the use of prescribed fire.
- Establishing a revolving loan fund, to be administered by the Colorado State Forest Service, will support and strengthen woody biomass marketing and utilization, and encourage increased use of bio-heating (reference Colorado Forest Products Program, (COWOOD efforts).
- Through **Improved Outreach and Technical Assistance**, this initiative will increase the capacity of the Colorado State Forest Service to develop CWPPs, implement mitigation plans and projects, conduct prescribed fires, expand GIS capabilities, and develop a web-based clearinghouse for forestry information.
- The Colorado State Forest Service continues to work with private landowners, communities, and local, state, and federal land management agencies to safeguard and improve the benefits our forests provide.
- Thoughtful, deliberate management will result in forests that are more resilient to the increasing pressures they face today and tomorrow, and will continue to provide the benefits Coloradans depend on and enjoy.
- **Legislation is effective upon signing June 3, 2009.** Available appropriations will be effective July 1, 2009. Funding is provided through Severance Tax, which comes in three increments, 40 percent on July 1, 2009; 30 percent on January 1, 2010, and 30 percent on April 1, 2010.