

10 September 2019

**MEMBER
JURISDICTIONS**

City of Glenwood
Springs

City of Steamboat
Springs

EAGLE COUNTY

Avon
Basalt
Eagle
Gypsum
Minturn
Red Cliff
Vail

GRAND COUNTY

Fraser
Granby
Grand Lake
Hot Sulphur Springs
Kremmling
Winter Park

JACKSON COUNTY

Walden

PITKIN COUNTY

Aspen
Snowmass Village

SUMMIT COUNTY

Breckenridge
Blue River
Dillon
Frisco
Montezuma

Congressman Scott Tipton
218 Cannon HOB
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Congressman Scott Tipton,

Active management of our national forests is vital to the public safety, local economies and to the sustainability of mountain communities which host millions of year-round visitors.

This is why, as Congress completes action on FY2020 appropriations bills, we request that you advocate strenuously for the "Fire Fix" dollars to return to the many uses from which they originated—specifically recreation management, roads, trails, fire mitigation and forestry. You should not let these funds become a bargaining chip during the appropriations process or siphoned off by special interests. You fought hard for this solution to rebalance USFS funding. Now it is time to see that funding returns to the broad purposes of the National Forests which have been neglected.

Thank you to representatives from Senator Gardner and Bennet's offices for including Northwest Colorado Council of Governments (NWCCOG) and Colorado Association of Ski Towns (CAST) in two conference calls this summer, allowing us to provide input on the Ski Area Fee Retention Bill. Our ongoing request regarding that bill continues to be that uses for the additional funds be expanded to meet many other deferred management needs within each National Forest, specifically all forms of recreation management including "front country ranger staff" and travel management which our members continue to fund in the absence of federal dollars. We are not opposed to Ski Fees being retained by impacted national forests, though we believe that to utilize the ski fee funds only for review of ski area permitting is far too narrow a purpose when so many critical USFS operations have been severely underfunded for a decade. Our position on the bill has not changed significantly since our July 26, 2018 letter on the same topic when local governments around the White River National Forest alone were poised to foot an annual bill of over \$300,000 in 2019 to fund local "front country ranger" staff. In 2019, Summit County alone is spending an additional \$450,000 when the cost of fire mitigation and paying for USFS contractors to complete fire mitigation projects on the national forest is included. Though not a member of NWCCOG, Denver Water spends \$3-\$4 million for fire mitigation on USFS lands across our region as well. This is such an urgent matter that every one of the contributing entities appears poised to budget again in 2020 in the absence of any clarity from Congress on this topic. When we confirmed these numbers with Denver Water, they asked to sign on to this document to underscore what the 28 other local jurisdictions wish to communicate to you.


We ask that you advocate for the FY2020 fire fix funds to be directed to Colorado National Forests to be spent in a balanced, locally appropriated manner to address many of the deferred management needs in our National Forests. At our August 2019 NWCCOG Council meeting our membership voted to re-directed our focus from the Ski Area Fee Retention bill, which we do not believe will proceed without broader support to the considerably more urgent matter of advocating that you shepherd the return of "Fire Fix" dollars to the USFS and restore full funding to the USFS.

We understand that the wood products industry has also suffered, but so have our citizens for whom the forest is their front yard and livelihood. Colorado is not the Northwest or the Southeast. Our forest "crop" is not board-feet. Our "crop" is the more than 20 million tourists who enjoy a variety of experiences on the national forests in the central and northern Colorado high country, who expect a high-quality recreation experience on public lands, as well as community safety which critically extends to active management of our surrounding National Forests. Fire borrowing put us years behind by diverted funds from active fire mitigation preparations which are critical to protecting our people, water supply, community infrastructure, and economy, leaving our forests in a situation of acute risk, and our increasing visitor impacts dangerously under-managed.

One of the five national forests within our region is the most visited in the entire country, White River National Forest, enjoyed by over 15 million people from around the U.S and the world. Each of the neighboring forests shares these challenges. We believe that funding for well-managed public lands are a federal responsibility, and that decisions about management needs within a specific forest district are best made on the ground, at a local level, by USFS staff working closely with the public and other partners. Our communities continue to be good neighbors by participating in those processes and by funding gaps in federal responsibility from their own coffers because the underfunding of recreation management continues to degrade this precious national resource.

We urge you to act to protect the "Fire Fix" funding through the appropriations process in Congress and then tell Secretary Purdue how important and transformative these funds could be to our 28 municipal and county jurisdictions.

Thank You, Sincerely,



Karn Stiegelmeier, NWCCOG Council Chair



James S. Lochhead, CEO/Manager, Denver Water

CC: The Membership (see letterhead), Senator Cory Gardner, Senator Michael Bennet, Congressman Joe Neguse