

Vision and Guiding Principles for Management of Colorado's Forests

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INTRODUCTION

The Vision and Guiding Principles that follow reflect agreement from the Forest Health Advisory Council on a framework for ensuring the effective, long-term stewardship of Colorado's forests. This framework should be regarded as a touchstone for all forestry partners, not to replace the many legal, regulatory, political and private mandates to which they must respond, but rather to guide both individual and collective decisions toward a future that is as consistent as possible with that envisioned here.

Colorado's forests provide a wealth of ecological, social and economic values that are important to Colorado's heritage, high quality of life, and economic health. Sound management of Colorado's forests is important to ensure the continued flow of these many benefits including improved air and water quality, plant and wildlife habitat, recreational opportunities, grazing, renewable energy and diverse wood products. In addition, we need to address the current condition of many forests in Colorado, which has left them extremely vulnerable to wildfire, insects, disease and other forms of large-scale disturbance that threaten their sustainability.

To address these pressing challenges in the short term, we must work in a focused and coordinated manner to ensure that limited resources are invested most effectively across the state. This coordinated approach should build on and strengthen collaborative, locally-based efforts where they exist and encourage the formation of such efforts where they do not.

Over the long term, we will endeavor to achieve a balanced approach to our forests that recognizes both human and environmental needs across the state and ensures the sustainability of forest resources and benefits for both current and future generations.

VISION

Our vision for the forests of Colorado is one of comprehensive and inseparable ecological, community and economic sustainability that recognizes the many values, both tangible and intangible, that flow from our forests. The essential foundation of this vision is the restoration and maintenance of healthy, resilient forest ecosystems across land ownership boundaries. Integral to this vision is the recognition that we share a vested interest in the health and sustainability of both our forests and our communities, and that with this common interest comes a shared responsibility to meaningfully engage in the stewardship of our interconnected landscapes.

To that end we see a future where the outcome of our vision is described by these three intertwined components of sustainability:

Ecological Integrity

Colorado's forest ecosystems are healthy, resilient and able to adapt effectively to change. These diverse forests incorporate a full range of native forest types and supply the habitats needed to support healthy and diverse populations of native plant and animal species. Disturbance regimes, such as periodic cycles of fire, are more able to function naturally and the value of these natural processes as a tool for accomplishing desired future conditions is recognized. Introduction and/or spread of non-native species is avoided or limited. Changing conditions and management needs that result from climate change are iteratively and meaningfully addressed. The integrity and function of our forested watersheds are sustained and, as opportunities arise, restored.

Community Values

Colorado's diverse human communities are supported and sustained by ecologically healthy landscapes, and the human uses of forests and water are conducted in ways that ensure ecosystem health and sustainability. Communities and local governments are proactive in addressing public health and safety concerns and are engaged in planning, preparing for and mitigating or avoiding wildfire and other forest-related risks to communities and vital infrastructure. Colorado residents are well informed and actively engaged in achieving and maintaining a balance of social, economic and ecological forest values; they accomplish this by sharing responsibility, working collaboratively and inclusively with each other, and honoring the social and cultural traditions that make up the state's unique character.

Economic Development

Healthy forests are recognized as essential to the state's economic well-being, providing a range of values and products including scenery, clean air and water, developed and backcountry recreation, wildlife habitat, grazing/ forage, forest products and renewable energy. Sustainable local businesses contribute to the accomplishment of forest management goals in a manner that increases the economic vitality of Colorado's human communities while also being appropriately tied to the productivity of the resource. Development associated with resource extraction, energy transmission and related activities is responsibly and effectively integrated with community and ecological sustainability.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Planning and Decision-Making Processes

- Utilize a collaborative and inclusive process in making decisions about forest management plans, projects and resources that involve public lands; strive for consensus.
- Recognize the value of existing, locally-based collaborative groups and endeavor to support their priorities and projects to the extent possible.
- Emphasize forest management approaches that address multiple ownerships or jurisdictions and cross-boundary challenges and are balanced across the state.
- Focus limited resources on projects that balance ecological, community and economic interests.
- Make use of a full range of information and tools when assessing forest management needs and opportunities.

Ecological Integrity

- Recognize ecological integrity as the foundation of long-term forest sustainability and conduct forest management, including planning and project implementation, in accordance with this principle.
- Ensure forest management is based on the best available science and is carried out in accordance with an adaptive management model that includes monitoring, measuring results, and adjusting management.
- Conduct forest management, including planning and implementation, with careful attention to minimizing the potential for negative cumulative impacts across the landscape and over time.
- Address the potential impacts of climate change, including adaptation needs for plant and animal species, proactively through research, management and planning.

Community Values

- In matters of public health and safety, community protection concerns may be prioritized above ecological and economic values in the short term, but a balance between the three components of sustainability is the long-term goal.
- Increase community and local government involvement in proactively planning for and reducing their risks from wildfire and other hazards related to living in and adjacent to disturbance driven forest ecosystems.
- Promote public education and outreach to inform and connect citizens to forests; this connection benefits the public, the land and future generations.
- Strengthen the public trust through consistent accountability of decision makers, managers and stakeholder groups.
- Foster a sense of shared responsibility and enhanced collaborative strength through public-private partnerships.
- Respect the diverse social and cultural values and assets among communities.

Economic Development

- Maintain and actively promote businesses that are appropriately sized for the wood and woody biomass resource made available through forest treatments designed to achieve and maintain desired future conditions in accordance with this vision.
- Seek sustainable, integrated businesses by providing a predictable supply of forest resources.
- Promote policies and decisions that increase local utilization of Colorado forest resources in order to decrease the carbon footprint associated with importing wood products and strengthen the market available to sustain local businesses.
- Promote and manage economic activities related to outdoor recreation, wildlife and other multiple uses of forest resources in a manner that is consistent with this vision.