

Statement of Lyle Laverty
Four Corners Chapter of the Association of Consulting Foresters
Before the Colorado General Assembly
Agriculture, Livestock and Water Committee
25 April 2022

Madame Chairwoman, Mr. Vice Chairman, distinguished Committee Members, I am Lyle Laverty current chair of the Four Corners Chapter of the Association of Consulting Forests – ACF. ACF is a professional forestry association based in Williamsburg, VA and represents 750 consulting foresters in 40 States. ACF members are professional foresters who devote 75 percent of their working time each year to performing technical forestry work on a “*fee or contract basis*” whose services are offered to the public rather than to a single full-time employer. ACF in Colorado is growing in membership and in its contribution to the professional management of Colorado’s forest. Four Corners Chapter of ACF serves the Four Corner States, however, Colorado has the “lions share” of active forestry consultants with nine (9) active members who primarily serve the owners of Colorado’s non-industrial private forest (NIPF) land. Of the 9 Four Corners members, two (2) are woman-owned business. In the Denver metro area there are four-member firms. In Northwest Colorado, there is one firm, while in Southwest Colorado, there are three firms in La Plata County and one in Montezuma County. Colorado forestry consultants advise the NIPF landowners in preparing forest management plans under the Colorado State Forest Service Forest Ag Program guidelines according to CRS 39-1-102.

Four Corners ACF members in Colorado professionally support our clients, the Colorado Tree Farm program, our colleagues in the Colorado Timber Industries Association and we are a vital force multiplier for the Colorado State Forest Service’s and the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service’s “on-the-ground” program delivery. We are the forestry professionals who solely represent the private forest landowners of the state.

Mills and Markets

Many Colorado NIPF landowners are “*land rich and cash poor,*” which makes it difficult to practice forestry. On-the-ground forestry in Colorado is now more of a service industry where land owners pay thousands of dollars per acre to fulfill treatment prescriptions on their land holdings. We would like to see more of high-bid timber sales and would be willing to assist the Committee to make this happen in Colorado, through favorable and encouraging legislation as well as economic development.

Prescribed Burning Prohibition Consequences

Since the North Fork Fire reforms, it has become exceptionally difficult to cost-effectively manage natural and post-logging slash, or activity slash in the NIPF of Colorado. The lop and scatter method of slash disposal followed by a late fall season under burn, is the least expensive and most environmentally beneficial to the land and residual vegetation because the nutrient recycling through the under burn is staying on-site. Yet, this is difficult to implement because of the North Fork Fire reforms. We would like to work with the Committee, the Colorado Division of Fire Prevention and Control and the Colorado State Forest Service to fully utilize post-harvest

under burning to effectively neutralize slash, recycle needed forest nutrients and to effectively and cost efficiently maintain forest lands with a more frequent fire return interval.

The Health of Colorado's Forest 2021

Colorado is blessed with high quality forests in the Central Rocky Mountains of the Nation. Unfortunately, Colorado has suffered from the precipitous withdrawal of the Forest Service timber sale program that formerly managed the stand densities and fuels accumulations of a dynamic and growing federal forest in the 1990(s). The impulsive reaction of the US Congress in the 1990(s) to reduce the appropriations for the National Forest timber sale program left many states, including Colorado "high and dry." Saw mills and other primary processing plants closed down for a lack of reliable timber supply. Today, we are still experiencing the consequences of such a fool hardy decision to reduce the Forest Service timber sale program with events such as Spruce bark beetle, Mountain pine beetle and Roundheaded bark beetle mortality in the public and private forests of Colorado. Four Corners ACF expresses deep concern with the current state of forest management in Colorado. I want to emphasize that private sector led conservation is the key to changing the dismal dynamic of impoverished timber markets and lack of on-the-ground capacity to successfully manage Colorado's non-industrial private forests. It is imperative that Colorado develop markets to process the logs harvested that would reduce the current forest densities to minimize insect infestations and change wildfire behavior.

Reforestation

Reforestation is needed in Colorado, not for replanting from clearcutting, but from high and moderately high intensity wildfire mortality. Because of excessive fuel loading, or the amount of live and dead woody vegetation in the forest matrix, fires today are burning with higher heat and radiation intensity which consumes nearly all forest trees and surface organic matter over large areas. This clarion call for reforestation is not being met because of shallow nursery capacity at both the State and Federal levels. There is only one State forest nursery at Ft. Collins. When high intensity fires burn non-industrial private forest land, there is little capacity in the nursery system to meet on-the-ground demand. Four Corners ACF members support the efforts to increase nursery capacity.

NGO Initiatives and the Threat to Private Sector Forestry

Fee-for-service Consulting forestry practices can adroitly address the forestry and conservation challenges in Colorado. Colorado consulting forestry firms pay "living wages" can offer medical and retirement benefits to employees and contribute to the State's tax base. Consulting forestry firms are one of the keys to the "middle class" in the forest-based economy of Western Colorado. However, opportunistic, non-governmental organizations (NGO) flush with Federal grant funding have decided that "free-forestry" is needed in Colorado. This is particularly evident in Southwest Colorado where one of the Rocky Mountain Restoration Initiatives is located. The American Forest Foundation and the Southwest Conservation Corps have teamed-up to provide free forest plans to NIPF owners in La Plata County. Needless to say, tax paying, payroll supporting consulting forestry firms can ill afford the competition from an affluent Washington, DC based NGO, which pays little or no taxes in Colorado and the employees of the initiative are not even forestry students or graduates of any of the Nation's forestry colleges or schools. We request that the Committee hold oversight hearings on these entrepreneurial

destroying initiatives, no matter how well intentioned the proponent's motives are. The old saying holds true here, that the *"road to hell is paved with good intentions."*

Conclusion

Four Corners ACF members and firms are committed to improving forest management and on-the-ground conditions for Colorado. NIPF forests provide abundant clean water, wildlife habitat, scenery and aesthetics, carbon dioxide sinks and forest products to the residents of Colorado. The Four Corners association of ACF stands ready to assist the Committee and the State Executive agencies in the effort to improve the management of Colorado's forests and rangelands. This concludes my testimony. I'll be happy to answer any questions you may have.