



Statement of Jerry Mallett, President of Colorado Headwaters

Before Colorado House of Representatives, March 23, 2026

HB26-1310 WILDFIRE RESILIENCY ACTIVE

Members of the House Committees of the

Agriculture, Water & Natural Resources

My name is Jerry Mallett, President of Colorado Headwaters, a regional conservation organization dedicated to the protection, management, and enhancement of the public lands in the Southern Rocky Mountain region. I have been actively involved in forest management for over 50 years.

I am here today to offer enthusiastic support of House Bill 1310 and the vision of the sponsors. This is the first line of defense for protection against wildfires.

Colorado has some twenty-two million acres of public lands and comparable acres in the private sector. These lands contain forest types of Ponderosa, Lodge Pole, Engleman Spruce, Blue Spruce, Pinon, and Juniper Pines throughout Colorado.

The critical issue of wildfire is of major concern today for all of Colorado's residents and state and government agencies. In view of the number of wildfires Colorado has experienced over the past 15 years, this hearing today is both timely and important.

Wildfires are a part of the ecological system of forest health and evolution in Colorado. But the management for the protection of human safety is paramount. HB 1310 is not only timely but long overdue. Defensible space is the first and most important line of protection for personal safety and property not only from forest fires but grass fires like the one that occurred in the Boulder area.

I live in Chaffee County and the Decker fire in 2019 came within $\frac{3}{4}$ of a mile from my home. The emergency units in the area had a good deal of time to address the situation and take action that protected homes in the area with the exception of one home that was lost.

My concern today is that Colorado and the Department of Natural Resources is activating a ponderosa pine beetle program for thinning 194,000 acres along the Front Range without



adequate scientific input. At the same time, Senator Hickenlooper Senate Fix Our Forests Act suspends environment review of forested areas of less than 10,000 acres.

The Trump administration is also acting to reduce obstacles to logging by taking "all necessary and appropriate steps ... to suspend, revise, or rescind all existing regulations, orders, guidance documents, policies, settlements, consent orders, and other agency actions that impose an undue burden on timber production." Primary targets are the Endangered Species Act and the National Environmental Policy Act.

In its one hundred days, the Trump administration temporarily cut off money for wildfire mitigation work and sharply reduced the ranks of federal government firefighters through layoffs and early retirement. That resulted in the loss of more than 1,600 qualified firefighters in the U.S. Department of Agriculture Forest Service and hundreds more in the Interior Department, according to the National Association of Forest Service Retirees.

In closing, I want to reiterate my support and congratulations on your vision to address a critical wildfire issue in Colorado without the extreme loss of forest values and extraordinary costs.

DATE: March 23, 2026

Dear Rep. Story and members of the Committee,

I am sorry I could not testify in person today, but I write this letter to support HB 26-1310.

I have reviewed information on various aspects of forest management, primarily in Colorado, for the last 45 years and worked hard to protect and maintain our forests. Forests are essential for all life on earth – from micro-organisms to charismatic animals like elk and black bear. They are also critically important for storing carbon and reducing the possible impacts for climate change. It is vitally important that we maintain our forests.

At the same time, fire, especially in a warming climate, is a considerable threat to homes and other infrastructure that lie within or adjacent to forests. I believe HB-1310 is good for our forests and for protecting structures.

Research conducted by the U. S. Forest Service and others shows that fires do not directly ignite structures (even one purely constructed with wood) from a distance of more than 30 meters (98 feet). Such structures can still be ignited by burning embers from fires some distance away, but if the home and surrounding area are protected, burning embers will not likely be able to ignite the home or any other structure. Thus removing flammable material from homes and the immediately adjacent area, i, e, “hardening” the home, will provide a high level of protection from any wildfire.

HB 1310 would directly address this issue by moving some money from the Wildfire Mitigation Capacity Development Fund to the Wildfire Resilient Homes Grant Program. The former fund does not provide money for home hardening, while the latter is specifically designed to give grants “for structure hardening in order to make them more resilient to wildfire risk”. (C. R. S. 24-33.5-1239 (2)(a))

In awarding grants, HB 26 1310 also would order the Division of Fire Prevention and Control to prioritize awarding grants to low-income homeowners and those physically unable to perform the work needed to harden a home. This will help ensure that all property owners will have an opportunity to harden their homes and related structures.

In short, HB 26-1310 would put money where it is most effective in reducing home susceptibility to fire. For this reason, we respectfully request that the Committee pass this bill.

I am happy to respond to any questions you may have. Please contact me by phone or e-mail, per below.

Thank you,
Rocky Smith, Forest Management Consultant
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I am writing in support of adoption of HB26-1310: Wildfire Resiliency Grant Money.

This bill addresses the serious need to provide support to residents to live more safely in fire-prone areas through home hardening and the creation of defensible space.

My support for HB26-1310 is based on my more than 40 years of conducting forest ecological research, especially on wildfire, in Colorado forests. Our peer-reviewed research publications in leading forest science and ecological science journals have been cited 1000s of times. My expertise on topics related to wildfire and how our society needs to coexist with wildfire has been recognized by the 100s of outreach presentations I have made at professional and public events organized by the Colorado State Forest Service, the Colorado Forest Restoration Institute, City and County Open Space and Park administrations, the National Park Service, and the USDA Forest Service.

Based on my expertise on the subject, I attest that the scientific literature on adapting to wildfire risk unanimously concludes that the most effective strategy for reducing home loss to wildfire is through home hardening and creation of defensible space. Scientific research has repeatedly demonstrated that these "fire wise" procedures are far more effective than strategies based on fuel thinning and prescribed burning at sites distant from homes.

I strongly support HB26-310.

Respectfully submitted by

Thomas T. Veblen

Distinguished Professor Emeritus, University of Colorado Boulder