

**FINAL ONE-YEAR REPORT ON HB07-1130
THE PILOT FOREST RESTORATION PROGRAM**

**SUBMITTED BY
COLORADO DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES**



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INTRODUCTION

In 2007, the Colorado General Assembly passed legislation titled The Pilot Forest Restoration Program to Demonstrate Community-Based Approaches to Forest Restoration. This report, required by the legislation and prepared by the Colorado State Forest Service, describes the successes achieved through projects authorized under the legislation. To be eligible to receive funding, projects were required to:

- ❖ Be located in an area with an approved Community Wildfire Protection Plan as defined by the federal “Healthy Forests Restoration Act of 2003”, Pub.L.108-148;
- ❖ Address one or more of the following objectives for the purposes of protecting water supplies:
 - Reduce the threat of large, high-intensity wildfires and the negative effects of excessive competition between trees by restoring ecosystem functions, structures, and species composition, including the reduction of nonnative species populations;
 - Preserve old and large trees to the extent consistent with ecological values and science;
 - Replant trees in deforested areas if such areas exist in the proposed project area; and
 - Improve the use of, or add value to, small diameter trees;
- ❖ Comply with all applicable federal and state environmental laws
- ❖ Include a diverse and balanced group of stakeholders, as well as appropriate federal, state, county, and municipal government representatives in the design, implementation, and monitoring of the project;
- ❖ Incorporate current scientific forest restoration information;
- ❖ Include an assessment to:
 - Identify both the existing ecological condition of the proposed project area and the desired future condition; and
 - Report, upon completion, to the Forest Service on the positive or negative impact, including cost effectiveness of the project; and
- ❖ Leverage state funding through in-kind, stumpage, or cash matching contributions.

PROCESS

Harris Sherman, Director of the Colorado Department of Natural Resources, appointed a Technical Advisory Panel, as required by the legislation. Members included an official of the Department of Natural Resources (Paul Orbuch); two representatives from federal land management agencies (Susan Gray, U.S. Forest Service, and Jeff Kitchens, Bureau of Land Management); two independent scientists with experience in forest ecosystem restoration (Merrill Kaufmann, Rocky Mountain Research Station *emeritus*, and Dan Binkley, Colorado State University); and representatives from conservation interests (Tom Fry, The Wilderness Society), local communities (Tom Clark, Mayor of Kremmling), and commodity interests (Nancy Fishering, Colorado Timber Industry Association).

Funds for the grant were directed to the Colorado Department of Natural Resources and then to the Colorado State Forest Service (CSFS) through an Interagency Agreement. Once the funding mechanism was in place, the CSFS issued a request for proposals in June 2007 and announced the grant awardees in August 2007. The CSFS received 43 applications for funding and 12 were awarded. Projects funded by the grant include:

- Dalla Park Fire Mitigation, LaPlata County, \$24,800
- Forest and Community Protection Plan, Lake County, \$69,000
- Grand Junction Watershed and Fuel Reduction Program, Mesa County, \$140,000

- Grand Lake Beetle Kill Removal Project, Grand County, \$140,000
- Heil Valley Ranch 2008 Fuels Reduction–Unit 2, Boulder County, \$50,000
- Horsetooth Mountain Park Fuels Reduction, Larimer County, \$80,000
- Platte Canyon Fire/Forest Restoration and Water Protection Project, Park County, \$70,000
- Santa Fe Trails Ranch Fuel Break Project, Las Animas County, \$125,000
- Straight Creek Forest Restoration Project, Summit County, \$10,895
- Summit County Hazardous Fuels Reduction Project, Summit County, \$140,000
- Upper South Platte Watershed Forest Health Initiative, Park and Teller counties, \$80,000
- West Vail and Lower Gore Creek Fuel Reduction Project, Eagle County, \$50,000

The language in HB 1130 required at least a 40-percent contribution in matching funds. Funds provided by HB 1130 leveraged another \$2.8 million in matching funds, significantly more than was required.

All projects were to be completed by April 30, 2009. An exception to project completion was attributed to weather conditions. Uncooperative weather canceled Larimer County’s plans for pile burns, as safety to resources and the community is non-negotiable. The 12 projects funded used a total of \$876,450 provided by this grant to treat 3,115 acres. The 12 communities contributed a total of \$1,355,004 as matching funds to accomplish their respective management objectives.

Since the initiation of the HB 1130 Pilot Forest Restoration Program, SB08-071 (SB 71) was authorized to extend forest management efforts and to continue demonstrating community-based approaches to forest restoration across Colorado’s watersheds. Three severance tax increments will provide \$1 million annually through 2012 to fund forest restoration projects. SB 71 currently is funding \$1.97 million for 29 projects that will be completed by September 30, 2010.

HB 1130 PROJECT ACCOMPLISHMENTS AND BENEFITS

In lieu of the prescribed pile burns, the *Horsetooth Mountain Park Fuels Reduction Project* treated 147 acres mechanically by hand crews, and the residual firewood will be offered to the public. All management activities followed the recommendations outlined in the Horsetooth Mountain Park Forest Management Plan developed by the Colorado State Forest Service in 2008. The Larimer County Emergency Services Mitigation Crew and the Larimer County Youth Conservation Corps joined the Larimer County Natural Resources Department to help mitigate wildfire risk in Horsetooth Mountain Park and the surrounding community, with special attention to protecting and improving Horsetooth Reservoir’s water supply.

Horsetooth Reservoir



Before treatment



After treatment

The *Platte Canyon Fire/Forest Restoration and Water Protection Project* is a model of efficient use of grant funds and getting acres treated through community support and participation. Although they received \$20,000 less than they anticipated, the Platte Canyon Fire Protection District still managed to treat 150 acres as originally planned. According to Jeff Davis, chief fire executive, the Platte Canyon FPD was “encouraged with the buy-in from the community, and their concern and diligence to get involved to help protect their property.” This project is a continuation of a comprehensive treatment strategy for an area with an extreme wildfire risk rating. Davis also said the project has “caught on like wildfire” and he hopes to continue serving the community with associated wildfire mitigation and forest management activities that focus on forest health.



Before treatment



After treatment

Through mechanical thinning, hand thinning, and prescribed burning, the *Grand Junction Watershed Protection and Fuel Reduction Program* implemented 321 acres of forest management projects on USFS lands and city-owned lands. The Western Colorado Youth Conservation Corps treated nearly 50 percent of the total project acres. All treatments were designed to protect a major portion of the city’s watershed from catastrophic wildfires because the drainage selected for treatment is the primary source of drinking water for 26,000 residents. This water source also provides emergency water supplies to 115,000 customers.



A hydro-axe is used to reduce fuel loads and improve the overall health of Grand Junction’s forest watershed.

The Summit County Fire Council benefitted from the additional funds provided by HB 1130 to implement forest management on another 111 acres as outlined in the Summit County Community Wildfire Protection Plan. The *Summit County Hazardous Fuels Reduction Project* focused on creating fuelbreaks ranging from 3 to 41 acres on eight separate projects, or communities. The management of projects and grant funds exhibited by the Summit County Fire Council illustrates proactive community participation in protecting Summit County homeowners, properties, and water supplies from wildfire. Water supplies in the area support overall community well-being and recreational opportunities for tourists and local residents. The fuelbreaks also will attribute to high-country forest health and help shape the future forest.

Fuelbreaks optimize scenic viewsheds and reduce wildfire risk for the community.



The *Straight Creek Forest Restoration Project* is setting the stage for forest restoration projects that will help address impacts from the current mountain pine beetle infestation, promote forest health, and reduce wildfire risk in the Dillon area. Greenlands Reserve developed the Straight Creek Forest Restoration Project Action Plan and Watershed Assessment with proactive objectives and actions to protect the Straight Creek Watershed. To jump-start the action plan, 10 acres of the National Forest System were harvested yielding 450 tons of timber, which was delivered to mills to produce a variety of wood products, including pellets. To ensure a healthy, high-quality water supply, Greenlands Reserve is planning to work with Friends of the Dillon Ranger District volunteers to implement a monitoring and sediment control program.



Implementing fuels reduction with harvesting equipment (left) and producing mountain pine beetle-killed blue-stained forest products (below) while improving forest health and reducing wildfire risk.



These projects exemplify the broad scope of treatments and benefits derived from the funding provided by HB 1130. As with most forest management/forest restoration projects, continued maintenance will be necessary to achieve optimum health and function of these forest ecosystems. Future treatments in these project areas will be easier to accomplish and will increase the cost-effectiveness of the program because less labor and time should be needed to plan and implement subsequent management activities to maintain forest restoration efforts.

CONTACT INFORMATION

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