

Statement of Congressman Scott Tipton
Friday July 20th, 2012
Before the House Subcommittee on Parks, Forests, and Public Lands
Legislative Hearing on H.R. 6089, “*The Healthy Forest Management Act.*”

Thank you Chairman Bishop for including my legislation, H.R. 6089, the Healthy Forest Management Act of 2012 in today’s hearing and for your support of this bill. I would also like to thank my fellow members of the Colorado Delegation, Congressman Coffman, Congressman Lamborn, and Congressman Gardner as well as Congressman Greg Walden and Congressman Gosar for their valuable contribution in this effort.

The bark beetle epidemic, rampant drought, and deteriorating forest health conditions have increased the propensity for devastating wildfires of the kind already seen in Colorado and throughout the Western United States this season. While the outbreak has affected state and private lands, the damage is oftentimes most heavily concentrated in federal lands where a lack of active forest management has allowed the epidemic to spread to catastrophic levels. Of the 6.6 million acres infested in Colorado, over 4 million are on federal forest lands. Federal efforts to responsibly manage our forests and prevent the conditions for the fires that have raged across Colorado and other Western states have been hampered by an unwieldy regulatory framework that systemically prevents progress toward healthy forests.

H.R. 6089, The Healthy Forest Management Act of 2012, gives greater control to those states and communities most directly affected by these conditions, and provides a pathway for comprehensive, landscape level planning with a local emphasis. This legislation builds on the bipartisan Healthy Forests Restoration Act of 2003 by empowering states counties, and tribes to have a more active role in addressing these emergency circumstances, we can proactively manage our forests, reduce future destruction from wildfires, safeguard water supplies and species habitats, and promote a healthy natural environment. Utilizing the tools in Healthy Forests Restoration Act which have proven to be effective, the Healthy Forest Management Act can help reduce the cost imposed on taxpayers due to litigation, expedite emergency mitigation procedures, and restore our forests before they go up in flames, when the costs are far greater. H.R. 6089 prioritizes conservation and will help reduce the investment required of taxpayers by making public private partnerships more feasible.

This bill is the result of more than a year of committee work, meetings with the Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management and other agencies, meetings with county and state officials, and with constituents; as well as Congressional hearings on forest management. Everyone that we talked to agreed that more needs to be done to manage our federal forests and this legislation is the outgrowth of that stakeholder engagement. This is further bared out by the groundswell of support that we have received for this legislation from Coloradans, local, state and national groups, and from organizations on both sides of the political spectrum, since the bill was introduced last week.

The Healthy Forest Management Act empowers governors to work with county commissioners and tribes to identify the most problematic areas—the spots that pose the most imminent risk of fueling a wildfire—and then take action to manage the risk by removing hazardous fuels, like beetle-killed timber.

This bill allows those who are most directly impacted by wildfire to take proactive measures to address the problem and mitigate the root causes of catastrophic wildfire.

This bill isn't a talker. It's a doer.

For this reason the Healthy Forest Management Act has received the support of the Colorado Timber Association, CLUB 20, the Colorado Association of Conservation Districts, and Commissioners from Routt, Montrose, Gunnison, Archuleta, Moffat, Dolores, Jefferson and Larimer Counties have given their endorsements. So have the Boone and Crockett Club, Farm Bureau, Federal Forest Resource Coalition, National Cattlemen's Beef Association, National Association of Counties, National Association of Forest Service Retirees, National Shooting Sports Foundation, National Association of Conservation Districts, Public Lands Council, Safari Club International and the Society for Range Management.

I urge my colleagues to join in this strong coalition of support for a common sense bill that takes action to fix the problem and seriously address the critical state of Western Forests.