

HEARING STATEMENT  
CONGRESSWOMAN BETSY MARKEY  
Mountain Pine Beetle  
June 16, 2009

Chairman Grijalva and Chairwoman Napolitano and Ranking Members Bishop and McMorris Rodgers, thank you for allowing me the opportunity to testify before your subcommittees today. I also want to thank you for holding this hearing on mountain pine beetles and highlighting what needs to be done to limit the hazards brought about by this epidemic.

As you will hear from many members of the panels today, the west is no stranger to bark beetle infestations. In the past, native bark beetles have served to renew forest ecosystems by weeding out older mature trees to allow younger trees to regenerate. Unfortunately, warm winter temperatures, drought conditions and uniform tree maturity have both stressed trees and created the perfect conditions for the current outbreak. The range of various bark beetles species has been traditionally limited by climate, but warmer temperatures have contributed to the outbreaks spreading into new areas.

While I will leave the entomology (en-toe-maul-o-gee) and ecology of bark beetles to the experts in the next panel, I would like to stress to the Committee why this issue is important to my district. Until recently, the Eastern Slope of the Rocky Mountains in Colorado has fared much better than the Western Slope in the bark beetle outbreaks. As my colleagues, Congressman Salazar and Polis can attest, the Western slope has seen large swaths of mature trees killed by the epidemic. The Forest Service expects this bark beetle outbreak will kill most of the mature Lodgepole pines covering 2.2 million acres in Colorado and southern Wyoming within the next 5 years. Some estimates indicate almost 2 million acres the have already been decimated. In 2007, the Forest Service detected bark activity in 4 million acres of lodgepole and ponderosa pine in the west. Many other states are being affected by beetle infestations.

The epidemic can be seen by the characteristic reddish hue the needles take on after about a year of infection. My district on the Eastern slope of the Rockies is showing signs that bark beetles have made it over the ridge and are now spreading to the eastern slope and the ponderosa pines in the Front Range.

Infestation prevention techniques in Colorado involve spraying individual trees, thinning highly susceptible areas, and monitoring individual healthy trees for infestation. These techniques are very labor intensive and do not guarantee the trees will survive. Therefore it is important to focus on how to limit the damages brought on by the epidemic and study ways to reduce the intensity of outbreaks in the future.

The Forest Service and Colorado State University are just two of the many entities studying the impact of bark beetle kill on wildfire risk. The Colorado Forest Restoration Institute in the Warner College of Natural Resources at Colorado State University works with other research institutions and private entities to apply field-based evidence to

implement healthy forest management practices. It is theorized that while canopy fire risks decreases as the dead needles drop to the ground, the threat of fire on the forest floor greatly increases due to the deadwood pile up on the surface. This deadwood can also contribute to increased nutrient loading in water supplies. Catastrophic wildfires can also have detrimental effects on water quality and supply as Mr. Wilkinson will testify in the next panel. Erosion and debris from wildfires can have long lasting effects on water quality and incur great expenses to repair.

The two biggest concerns in my district are increased threat of wildfire due to the beetle killed trees and the impact of the bark beetle infestation on watershed health and water quality. Colorado's fourth Congressional District covers part of Rocky Mountain National Park, extends out east to the Nebraska and Kansas borders and runs as far south as the Oklahoma border. My district contains mountains, plains, grasslands, and some of the best agricultural land in Colorado. Weld County, in the 4<sup>th</sup> CD, is the number one ranking county in the state for agricultural products sold and eighth in the nation. The Eastern Plains of Colorado, including Weld County, depend on the water that flows from the Rocky Mountain forested areas. In the West, and especially in the dry state of Colorado, water is a resource more precious than gold.

To ensure our forests and water are protected, it is imperative that we provide a stable source of funding for emergency wildfire suppression, such as provided in the FLAME Act. By creating a separate fund for unpredictable emergency wildfire efforts we can ensure annual funding for fire prevention and fuel reduction programs are not wiped out by sudden catastrophic wildfires. This bill also requires the development of wildfire management strategies by the Department of Agriculture and the Department of the Interior in addition to establishing wildfire grants to encourage individual communities to develop their own wildfire emergency plans. Being prepared for wildfire activity in advance will inherently reduce the risks of wildfire associated with the bark beetle kill.

I would also like to stress how important it is for wildfire prevention plans to implement protections from hazards affecting water infrastructure and watershed health. These include plans to control debris and sediment accumulation as well as thinning around potential critical access sites to ensure these control measures can be put in place as soon as possible following wildfires. By putting in place infrastructure protections and response programs, we can ensure that should a wildfire take place, communities will be prepared to quickly mitigate the damage to our water supply.

Federal programs like the Colorado Good Neighbor Authority and the pending FLAME Act are making strides in wildfire prevention and mitigation, but Congress can do more. The number one barrier to implementing wildfire prevention plans and beetle kill mitigation programs is funding. I along with the rest of the delegation sent a letter to Secretaries Salazar, Vilsack, Chu and Napolitano urging the agencies to use Recovery funds to address the bark beetle kill mitigation.

Finally, I would be remiss if I did not to stress the importance of providing the USDA Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service with the resources they need to update the

Quarantine 37 regulations for the importation of plants into the US. While bark beetles are a native species to the west, our forests are prone to invasive species without these updated regulations. Updating these regulations will ensure we are not unnecessarily exposing our forests to destructive invasive plants.

Thank you again Chairman Grijalva and Chairwoman Napolitano and Ranking Members Bishop and McMorris Rodgers for allowing me the opportunity to speak before the subcommittees this morning.