



Board Agenda Background

Date: 3/17/2026
To: Board of County Commissioners
Through: Colton Rohloff, County Manager
From: Alexis Sohlden, Public Lands Manager
Subject: Work Session: Letter of Support for Clear Bear Fire Mitigation Plan with USFS Forest Service

BACKGROUND

The Clear Creek Ranger District of the Arapaho and Roosevelt National Forests and Pawnee National Grassland (ARP) has identified a need to reduce the risk of uncharacteristic fire behavior and severity in dry montane, fire-adapted conifer forests that adjoin and intermix with private lands. The project focuses on fire mitigation within strategic, fire-suppressed ponderosa pine and dry mixed-conifer forests, addressing a high-priority need supported by broad scientific consensus.

The specific goals of the project are to:

- Promote and enhance community readiness for wildfire by improving ingress/egress and suppression opportunities along key strategic features;
- Increase forest resiliency by minimizing large tree mortality during unplanned wildfires through the reduction of potential fire behavior and fire severity; and,
- Address the hazards created by mountain pine beetle-caused tree mortality to firefighters and the public.

The primary strategy will be to use treatments that reduce or maintain the surface, ladder, and canopy fuels (in that order of importance) while retaining the largest, most fire-resistant trees. Supporting and secondary goals include:

- Timber stand improvement to increase individual tree vigor and reduce the threat of insect and disease; and,
- Restoring the natural role of fire within fire-adapted forests.

The Clear Bear Wildfire Resiliency Project was identified in the ARP's FY 2026 Greenlight Letter as 'Clear Creek Community Wildfire Protection Plan/Defensible Space Categorical Exclusion (CE)' as a high-priority project due to its alignment with agency priorities regarding the improvement of forest health through active management (Timber and Fuels).

Identified partners include:

- Clear Creek County Fire Authority
- Clear Creek County Open Space
- Clear Creek Watershed Forest Health Partnership
- Colorado State Forest Service
- Denver Water
- Jefferson County
- Lookout Mountain Water
- Upper South Platte Partnership
- Xcel Energy



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The proposed actions are consistent with the Forest Plan and with the Clear Creek and Jefferson Counties' Community Wildfire Protection Plans.

ANALYSIS

The Clear Bear Wildfire Resiliency Project is in Clear Creek and Jefferson County within the Clear Creek Ranger District. The northern part of the project area is adjacent to the community of Pine Valley, just north of Beaver Brook Reservoir, bounded by Beaver Brook Canyon Road to the north and Beaver Brook Trail to the south. Clear Creek County Open Space, USFS, Colorado State Forest Service, and Lookout Mountain Water District all own and manage property that is in this proposed project area. Clear Creek County Open Space's parcels total approximately 50 acres.

Proposed Action

Project actions include manual cutting, yarding, piling of slash, and prescribed fire (pile burning, jackpot burning, and broadcast burning). Activities will focus on the removal of surface, ladder, and canopy fuels (in that order of importance) while retaining the largest, most fire-resistant trees. After the initial treatment, follow-up actions to maintain desired conditions are anticipated at two intervals:

- 1-5 years after initial treatment to address blowdown and hazard trees; and,
- 10-15 years after completion to maintain initial treatment efficacy.

The overall project duration, including maintenance, is estimated at 15–20 years. Initial implementation is anticipated to begin in Summer/Fall 2027, subject to USFS priorities and funding.

Equipment Usage

Equipment includes chainsaws, drip torches, vehicles, UTVs/ATVs, and hand tools. Chainsaws, drip torches, and hand tools will be transported to the project site and staged off-site in approved storage facilities. During prescribed fire operations, vehicles and UTVs/ATVs may be staged near the project area overnight.

Ground Disturbance

Ground disturbance is anticipated to be temporary and includes manual yarding of material, piling, and prescribed fire, both pile burning and broadcast burning. Yarding would be by hand, i.e., dragging material by hand to a pile. Prescribed fire will occur across most of the project footprint, but burning is typically patchy in nature with scattered, unburned pockets.

County Considerations

The Clear Bear Wildfire Resiliency Project directly interfaces with private lands, County roads, County lands, recreational access points, and municipal watershed areas. Given the location within intermix zones and near developed communities, coordination with Clear Creek County departments will be necessary.



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CONCLUSION

This memorandum is intended to provide the Board of County Commissioners with a briefing regarding the initiation of the Clear Bear Wildfire Resiliency Project by the USFS. Staff seeks direction from the Board regarding the desired level of County engagement during the scoping and implementation process and whether formal comment or coordination efforts should be initiated.

ATTACHMENTS:

1. Clear Bear Beaver Brook Proposed Action
2. Clear Creek Fire Authority Community Wildfire Protection Plan