

FORESTS, WATERSHEDS & SOURCE WATER PROTECTION

Western Drought:

Lessons Learned, Paths to Success

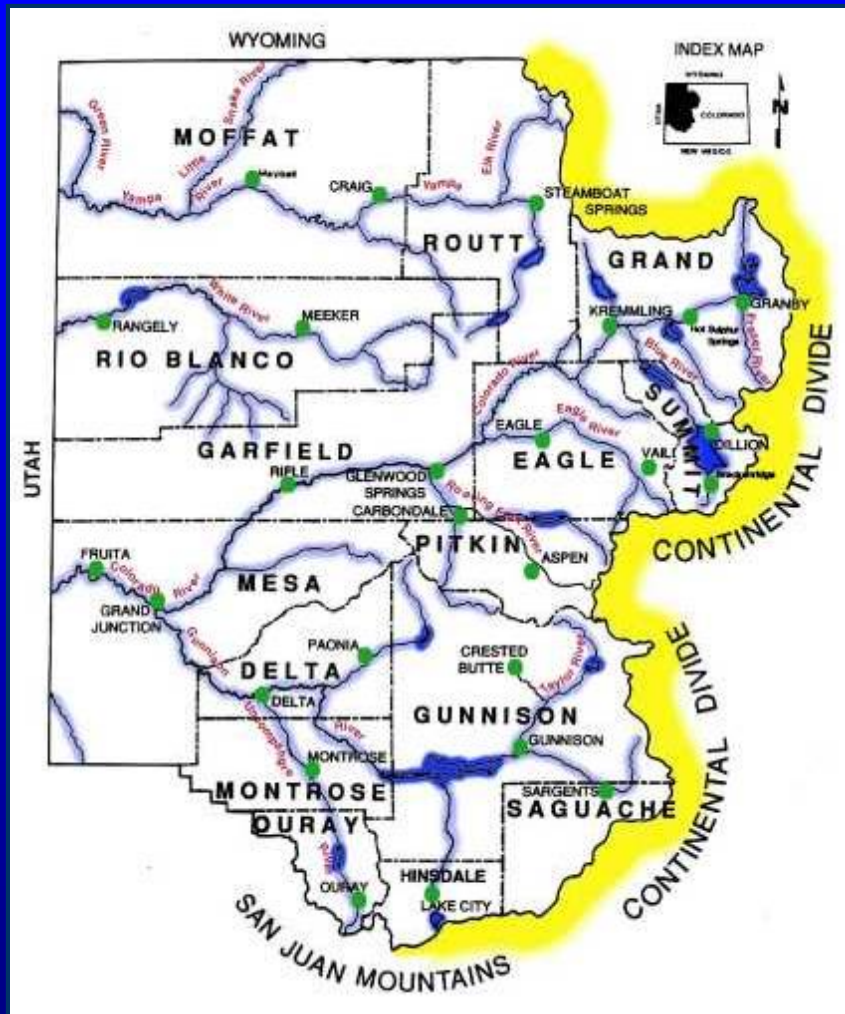
Chris Treese

Manager, External Affairs



Protecting Western Colorado Water Since 1937

Colorado River District



1937 state statute

To protect, conserve,
manage and develop

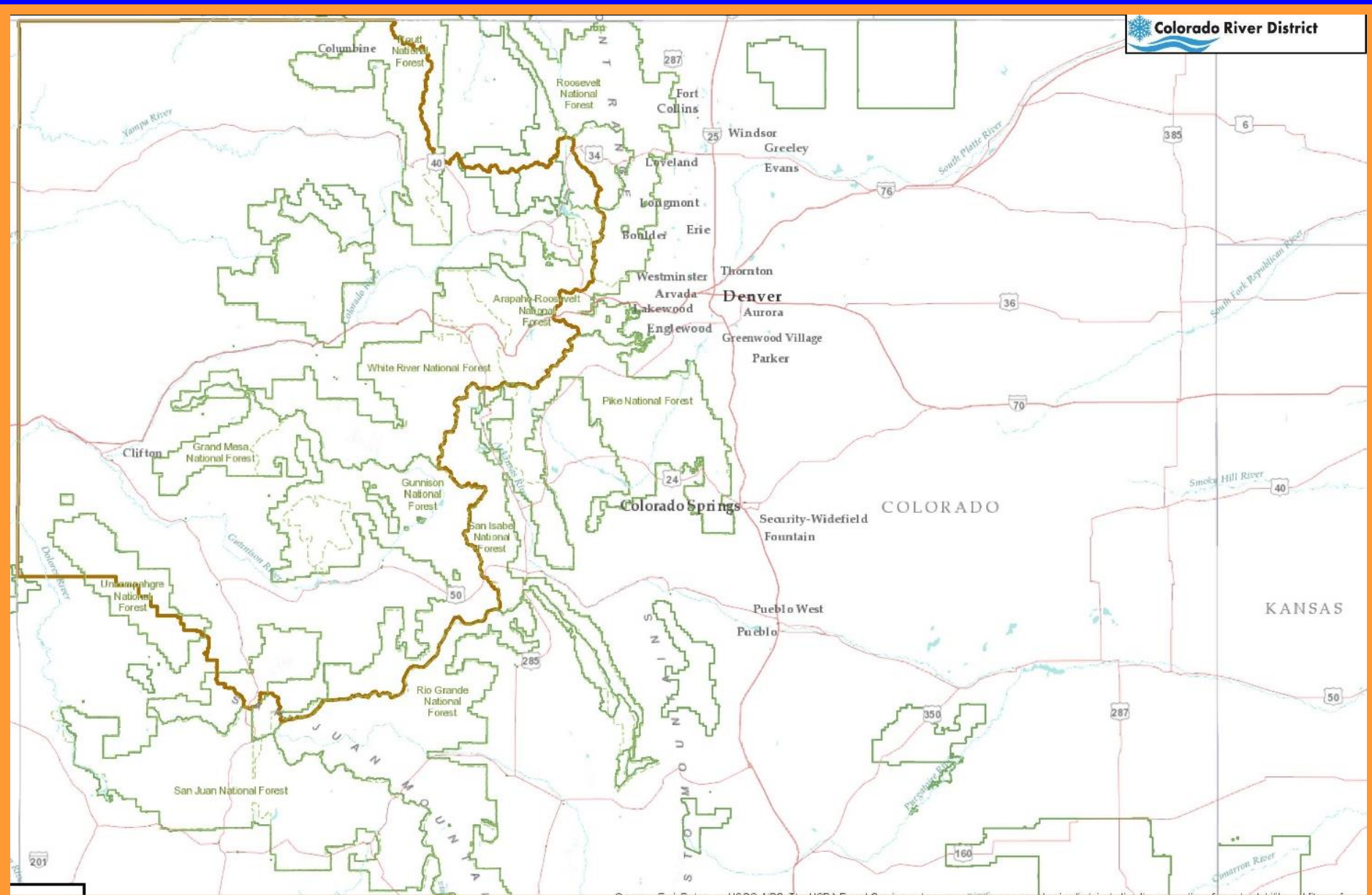
One of four
Water Conservation
Districts in Colorado



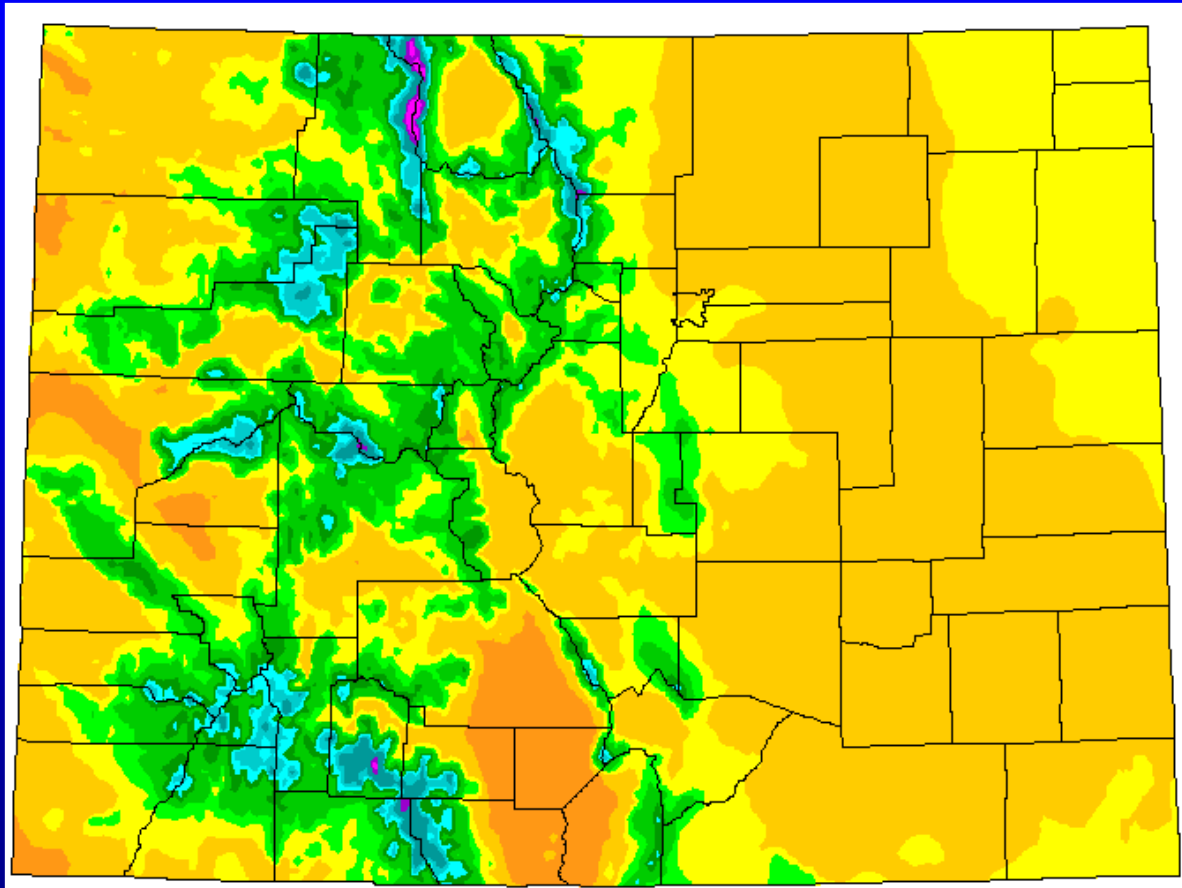
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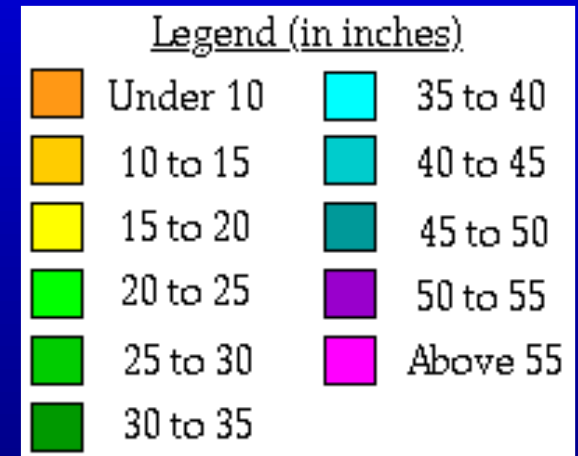
USFS Lands / Colorado River District



Colorado is Semi-arid



Statewide annual
average
precipitation:
17.5"

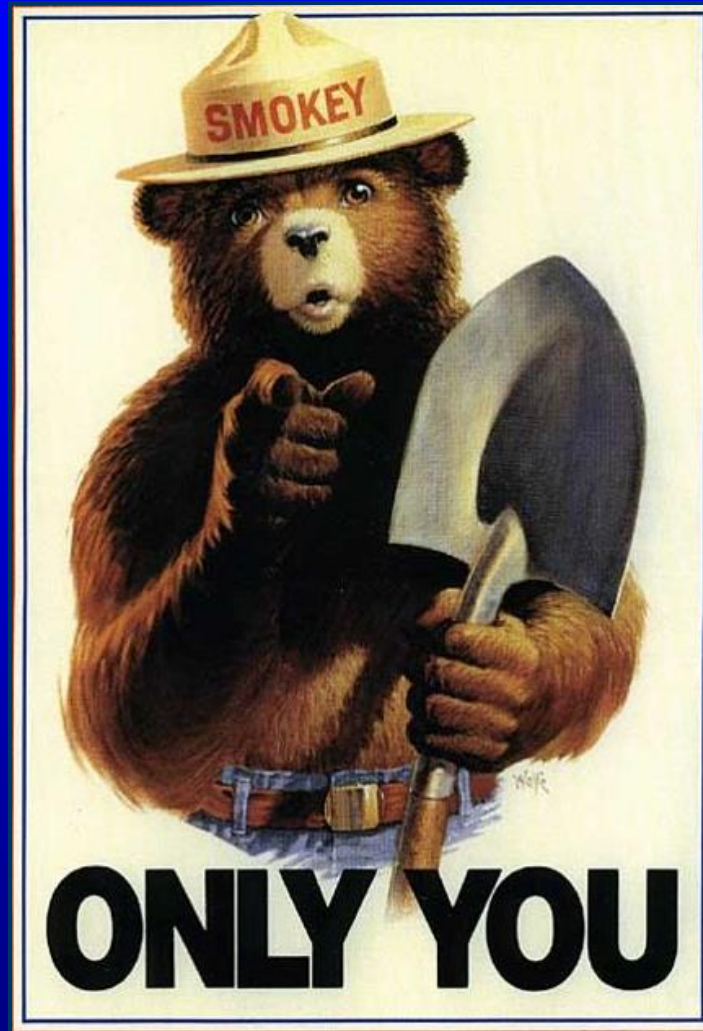


Western Perspective

- **> 90% of surface waters originate on federal lands**
- **Fires –**
 - **2004-2007 40,000 ac/yr**
 - **2008-2015 140,000 ac/yr**
 - **2017 Another year of record fires**

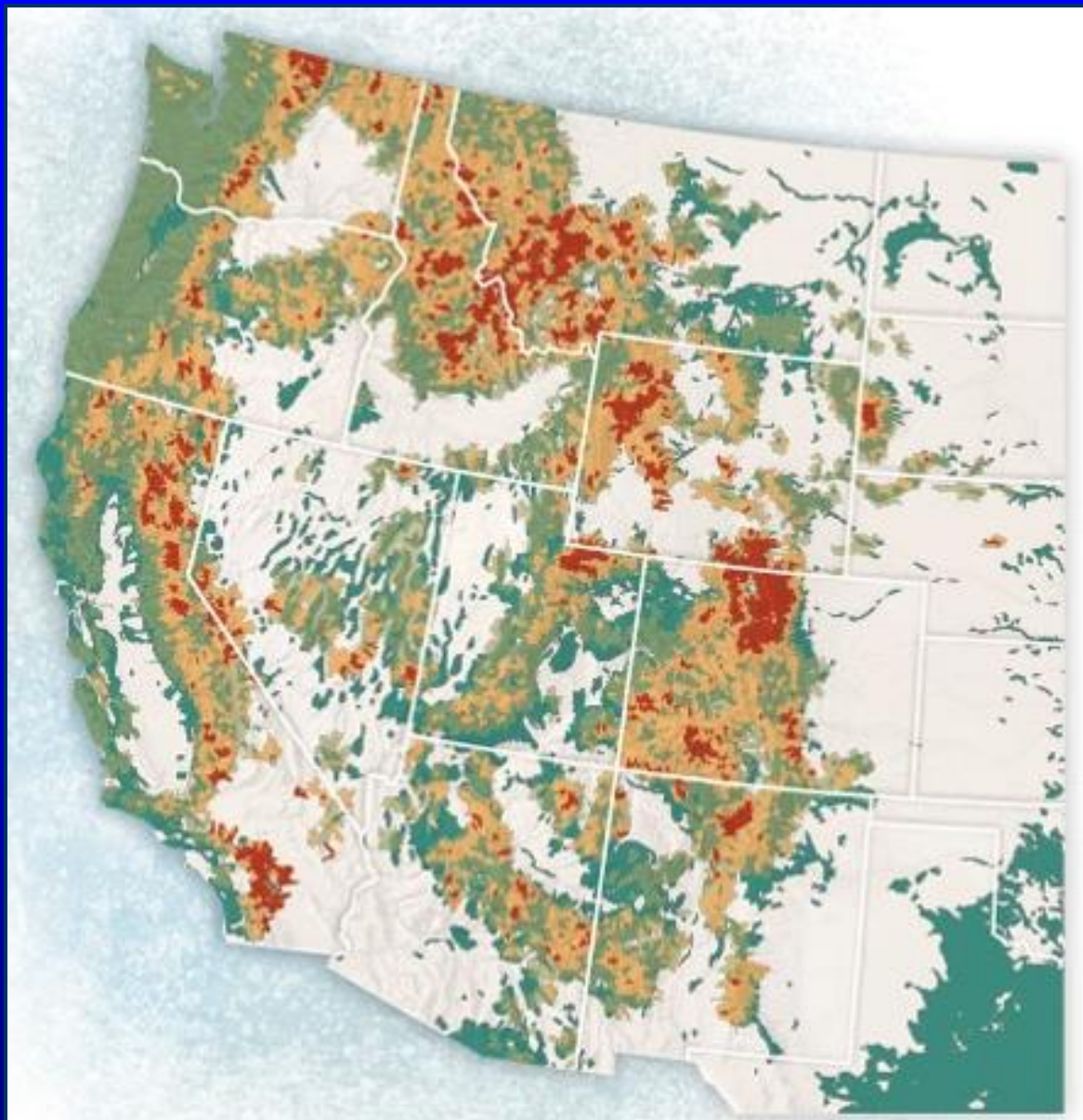
Large-scale wildland fires – more frequent & larger

Public Enemy #1 (?)



Percentage of trees seen with damage

- 1%-10%
- 11%-50%
- 51%-100%
- undamaged
tree areas



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Moisture Content





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Buffalo Creek Fire

May 18, 1996

Burned 11 miles in 4 hrs.

11,900 acres

Disaster totaled \$35M

Buffalo Creek Flood

July 12, 1996

Rained 2.5" in 2 hrs.

Severe erosion,

Major flooding,

Silted Strontia

Springs Res.

7% of capacity



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Strontia Springs Reservoir



Hayman Fire & Flooding



June 8 - 18, 2002

Burned 138,114 acres

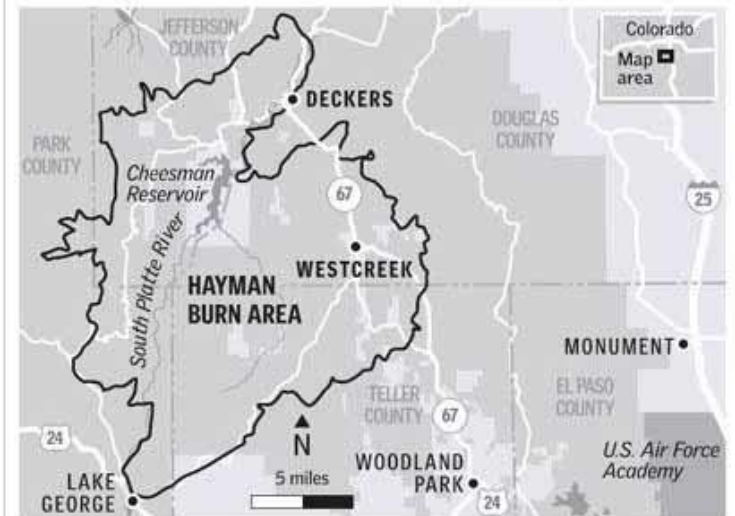
Totaled \$39M for firefighting

Burned over 600 structures

Totaled \$40M property value

Flooding in the foothills

With virtually no vegetation to hold back the runoff on the land burned in the Hayman fire, heavy rains since Friday have caused property and road destruction from Westcreek to Deckers.



The Denver Post



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Wildfire's Toll

- Infrastructure Loss
- Environmental Costs
- Economic Toll: *“All of Colorado is on fire.”* Governor Bill Owens
- Expensive
 - Fire fighting
 - Post-fire mitigation
 - Water treatment
- Human loss

Water Treatment



- *Image courtesy of the Salt River Project*

Challenges

- **Fire borrowing**
- **Administration**
- **NEPA**
- **Lack of Partnerships**
- **Changing policies & practices**

Initiatives

- **Back to the Future**
 - USFS, Organic Act
- **Forest Partnerships**
 - Denver Water, 'Forest to Faucet'
- **Source Water Protection Act**
- **Watershed Protection programs**
- **REACT, BAER**

Senator Michael Bennet (D-CO)

"What comes through to me is that there is a compelling consensus that what we are doing now does not work, and that we have got to change and it's long overdue... In the name of fiscal responsibility we are managing our forests in the most fiscally irresponsible way we can manage them. Which is to say we are taking the money that could be spent on mitigation and restoration, and we're using it to suppress fires and then there's no money left to mitigate or restore. It's penny wise and pound foolish. Nobody at the local level would accept this way of managing their resources, and we shouldn't accept it either."



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Progress

- **2018 Consolidated Appropriations Act**
 - “End” to Fire Borrowing
 - CatEx for Fire Regimes I, II, & III
- **2018 Farm Bill**
 - H.R. 2 (oops)
 - S. 3042
- **Resilient Federal Forests Act**
 - H.R. 2936

Action



WESTCAS

- On the ground Reality Check
- Cost of Treatment
- Cost of Prevention
- Loss of Infrastructure
- Cost of Redundant Systems to ensure Reliable Deliveries
- Congressional Tours



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