

February 5, 2025

The Honorable Bruce Westerman
Chairman, House Natural Resources Committee
U.S. House of Representatives
1329 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Westerman,

On behalf of the Board of Commissioners for Douglas County—Abe Laydon, Chairman, Kevin Van Winkle, Commissioner, and George Teal, Commissioner—and Sheriff Darren Weekly, we want to extend our sincere appreciation for the time your staff dedicated to meeting with us.

We also want to express our strong support for your *Fix Our Forests Act* and leadership on active forest management issues. The challenges posed by dangerous wildfires are intensifying across the West, and we appreciate your commitment to addressing these issues head-on. The legislation you champion is a critical step in ensuring our national forests are properly managed, and your efforts to mitigate wildfire risk through proactive forest management are invaluable. We stand with you in supporting this important initiative and look forward to collaborating on solutions that protect our communities, natural resources, and ecosystems.

We were grateful for the opportunity to share the work of our Helitack team and the success of our helicopter operations, which have played a pivotal role in extinguishing wildfires—33 of which we fought last year. We were encouraged by our discussion regarding the potential for a regional facility for first responders. The idea of providing local law enforcement training and developing a facility that enhances our ability to combat wildfires is a promising initiative. We are hopeful that future collaboration on this project will prove beneficial to improving public safety and bolstering our wildfire suppression efforts.

Additionally, we are eager to work with the Committee as part of the ongoing efforts to advance American energy dominance and promote responsible energy production. Colorado and Douglas County stand to benefit significantly from policies that encourage domestic energy production. By continuing to work together, we can promote energy independence, create jobs, and ensure a stable energy future for our communities.

Water availability is another critical concern, and we are committed to working with your Committee to increase water storage and improve the reliability of water supplies across the region. Douglas County, like many areas in the West, faces growing pressure on its water resources due to population growth and the challenges of maintaining sustainable water supplies. By investing in modern water infrastructure and working toward solutions that increase storage capacity, we can take action to help ensure that our communities have reliable water access for future generations.

Lastly, we are excited about the potential development of a biochar plant in Douglas County. This facility would serve multiple purposes: mitigating wildfire risks, supporting environmental sustainability, and creating valuable byproducts for various industries. Biochar is a proven method for improving soil quality, reducing emissions, and offering an additional tool in wildfire risk reduction. We see this as a critical step in enhancing both the health of our environment and the safety of our community.

As our Congresswoman, Rep. Lauren Boebert, serves on the Committee on Natural Resources, we also look forward to working closely with her and the other Colorado members of the Committee to address these important issues.

Once again, we thank you for your leadership and dedication to tackling the critical issues facing our region. We look forward to continuing to work with you and the Committee to advance solutions that enhance public safety, promote environmental stewardship, and secure a prosperous future for our communities.

Sincerely,



Abe Laydon, Chairman



George Teal, Commissioner



Kevin Van Winkle, Commissioner



Darren Weekly, Sheriff