

February 3, 2025

Mr. Chris French
Deputy Chief for National Forest Systems
U.S. Forest Service
1400 Independence Ave. SW
Washington, D.C. 20250

Dear Deputy Chief French,

On behalf of the Board of Commissioners for Douglas County and Sheriff Darren Weekly, we want to extend our sincere appreciation for taking time to meet with us. Your insights and open dialogue regarding the important issues facing our national forests were both informative and constructive. We found our discussions on forest management, biomass, and potential funding opportunities extremely helpful. We appreciated the opportunity to share the work of our Helitack team and the success of our helicopter operations, which have been instrumental in putting out wildfires—33 of which we fought last year.

We found your suggestions incredibly valuable, especially regarding meeting with Rocky Mountain Regional Forester, Troy Heithecker, and the various biomass and biochar grant programs he is overseeing. We will reach out to Troy soon and learn more about these opportunities, including guaranteed loans, wood innovation grants, and transportation funding that could greatly benefit our county.

Your recommendation for a cooperative agreement with in-kind county donations for the shooting range analysis work is much appreciated, and we will explore this option further. Additionally, we are eager to begin working on a diversified industry strategy to address the challenges presented by low-value timber and the absence of a nearby sawmill. We are excited about the potential of mulching, biochar, wood insulation, commercial pellets, hydrogen production, and aviation fuel as viable solutions, and we will investigate these opportunities.

We appreciate your insight into the 21 landscape designations and how those could be used more broadly in Colorado. We will certainly follow up on your suggestion to contact the National Forest Foundation Board to explore biomass and biochar opportunities.

Thank you again for your time, expertise, and collaboration. We are confident that our combined efforts will lead to positive outcomes for the communities we serve and the public lands we all value. We look forward to further discussions and working with you and your team to reduce the risk of dangerous wildfires, protect our communities, improve public safety, and foster economic opportunities for Douglas County.

Sincerely



Abe Laydon, Chairman



Kevin Van Winkle, Commissioner



George Teal, Commissioner



Darren Weekly, Sheriff