

2027 Colorado Forest Health Council Legislative Priorities
Final draft
Presented to and adopted at Council 4.9.2026

These priorities are those of the Colorado Forest Health Council. They do not necessarily reflect the budget or legislative priorities of the Colorado Department of Natural Resources. Budget and legislative priorities of the Department of Natural Resources are evaluated on an annual basis as part of the Governor’s legislative and budget agenda development process.

1. Acknowledge the importance of forest health and wildfire mitigation funding: Colorado Strategic Wildfire Action Program, Forest Restoration & Wildfire Risk Mitigation Grant Program, and Healthy Forests Vibrant Communities

The Forest Health Council recommends the appropriate committee of reference draft a letter to the Joint Budget Committee reiterating the importance of statewide funding for forest health and wildfire mitigation programs. Ongoing and consistent funding for the Colorado Strategic Wildfire Action Program (COSWAP), Forest Restoration & Wildfire Risk Mitigation Grant Program (FRWRM), and Healthy Forests Vibrant Communities (HFVC), is imperative to meet the urgent needs for forest health and wildfire mitigation around the state.

COSWAP funds high priority wildfire mitigation projects in strategic focus areas through two unique programs. The Workforce Development grant program pays for conservation corps and Department of Corrections SWIFT crews to complete wildfire mitigation projects that reduce wildfire risk to life, property and infrastructure while also supporting, entry level training opportunities and experience for individuals interested in wildfire mitigation and forestry. COSWAP’s Landscape Resilience Investment funding makes targeted investments in strategic focus areas through landscape scale fuels mitigation projects. These projects allow for local leaders to fund priority projects in their landscapes.

The FRWRM program provides critical state support through competitive grants that enable high-impact, community-driven projects across Colorado to reduce the risk of wildfire to people, property and infrastructure in the wildland-urban interface (WUI), promote forest health and forest restoration, and encourage the use of woody material for traditional forest products and biomass energy.

The Healthy Forest Vibrant Communities Act increases the capacity of the Colorado State Forest Service (CSFS) to ensure the long-term health and vitality of Colorado’s

forests. It is the role of the CSFS to provide private landowners, communities and partners with the tools they need to address forest and watershed health and wildfire risk to communities and the forests that surround them.

These programs are all complementary and unique. They each support forest health through differing implementation and funding strategies. The demand for forest health and wildfire mitigation far exceeds current investments; in 2025 FRWRM and COSWAP funding requests exceeded \$32 million the programs were only able to fund 48% of the total demand. The State can not afford to divest from this effort nor divert this funding to other wildfire mitigation efforts. These landscape efforts are an important part of forest resilience in addition to home hardening and defensible space.

2. Adopt Colorado's 2055 Vision for Forest Health in Colorado

The Colorado Forest Health Council developed a 30 Year Vision for Forest Health in Colorado for adoption and implementation by policy makers, leaders, implementers and residents. The Council recommends that the General Assembly pass a resolution recognizing the Colorado Forest Health Council's new 30 Year Vision as the state's 2055 Vision for Forest Health in Colorado. Full implementation of the 30 Year Vision will require the commitment of resources from public, private, and other sources as available and appropriate.

3. Workforce Development

The forestry and wildfire mitigation workforce in Colorado is aging; to meet the current and growing need for forest health and wildfire mitigation work the workforce must be supported and grown. The Forest Health Council sees workforce development across age ranges as imperative for healthy forests in Colorado now and in years to come. Past efforts like the Timber, Forest Health, and Wildfire Industries Workforce Development Program, have been successful in supporting workforce development at various ages from highschoolers to post graduation internships. The Council recommends the appropriate committee of reference indicate this priority to the Joint Budget Committee and continue to support however possible, investments into, and prioritization of, this issue.

4. Increase weight limits for trucks transporting forestry products

The Colorado Forest Health Council has heard from various forest health and wildfire mitigation planners and implementers that biomass management and the costs for transporting biomass off of projects can inhibit the work. By the time transportation costs are incurred the wood being removed from a wildfire mitigation or forest health

project may have no monetary value; this increases the costs of important forestry work significantly.

To address the costs of biomass transportation, the Council proposes coordinating with forest health partners, the Colorado Department of Transportation and counties to address this need within the timber industry. The Council recommends exploring raising the weight limits for trucks carrying forestry products to lower transportation costs and allow for more strategic mitigation and forest health projects within the state.

Context: The Legislative Committee and Council staff have had conversations with partners including the Colorado Department of Transportation on this topic. CDOT staff, including those in the Freight Mobility and Safety Branch and those who permit oversized and overweight trucks, were eager to explore this issue with the Council and forest products transportation professionals as needed to further understand the challenges and possible solutions. Close collaboration will be imperative for the further development of this policy recommendation.

5. Update regulation for biochar production with flame cap kilns

As noted above, biomass produced as a byproduct of forest health and wildfire mitigation projects is a challenge to utilize and transport. Creating end uses for this product would allow the cost to decrease and utilization is preferred. Biochar is a carbon-rich material produced by heating biomass in very high temperatures in an anaerobic environment. Once heated, this product is porous and stable and can be utilized across agricultural, ecological and industrial uses.

Producing biochar in a flame cap kiln is currently classified as incinerating construction material which makes it prohibitively costly and administratively burdensome compared to piling and burning slash. Flame cap kilns are small and a part of the diverse array of local solutions to the biomass challenges that forest health and wildfire mitigation projects face. Updates to regulations on flame cap kilns could reduce the barriers for biochar production and biomass utilization from forest residues. Pile burning would be a more appropriate classification for flame cap kilns than construction incineration.

Context: Council staff will liaise with the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment and Colorado Energy Office. Washington state passed a bill that addressed a similar issue.

SB 6121 - 2023-24, SILVICULTURAL AND AGRICULTURAL COMBUSTION—FLAME
CAP KILNS