

UNITED STATES SENATE

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CONTACT: Kristin Lynch (Bennet) – 303-837-3802

Mike Saccone (Udall) – 202-224-4334

Bennet, Udall Welcome USDA Action to Combat Insect and Disease Epidemics in National Forests

Expedited Treatment Authority Stems from Bennet-Udall Bill

Washington, DC – Colorado U.S. Senators Michael Bennet and Mark Udall today praised the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s announcement that it has designated 94 national forest areas in 35 states for expedited insect and disease treatments. In Colorado, over 9.6 million acres in the Arapaho-Roosevelt, Grand Mesa, Gunnison, Pike, Rio-Grande, Routt, San Juan, and White River national forests will receive treatment.

The authority to expedite the treatment process stems from the [National Forest Insect and Disease Treatment Act](#), a bill Bennet introduced and Udall cosponsored last year. It was [signed into law as part of the Farm Bill](#) earlier this year.

“Millions of acres in Colorado’s forests and throughout the country have been devastated by insect and disease epidemics. It’s hurting our tourism economy and threatening critical infrastructure, recreation, and our forested communities,” **Bennet said**. “We made sure to include environmental safeguards while putting in place tools for expediting treatment of these at-risk areas. This work by the Forest Service will help reduce the risk of wildfires and the threats they pose to our communities and natural resources.”

“There is no greater threat to Colorado’s homes, lives and special way of life than the growing threat of wildfire. Today’s announcement is a victory for Colorado communities threatened by fire and those who depend on water supplies from forests where dead wood and fuel loads have grown to dangerous levels,” **Udall said**. “While this is a step in the right direction — and a legislative victory I am proud of — I will continue to fight to ensure our forest managers and firefighters have the tools they need to protect our communities. It also is essential that we continue to support the partnerships the U.S. Forest Service has with forest products and biomass industry to find innovative ways to turn the beetle kill problem into jobs.”

The bill directs the Forest Service to treat one or more subwatersheds on all National Forests that are experiencing certain thresholds of insect epidemics or disease that impairs forest health. In consultation with state officials, USFS will identify eligible areas to conduct expedited treatments of acreage suffering from insect and disease epidemics.

Bennet, a member of the Senate Agriculture Committee that wrote the Farm Bill and the Conference Committee that finalized it, was instrumental in including the National Forest Insect and Disease Treatment Act in the Farm Bill. He also secured several other provisions designed to reduce the risk of wildfire into the Farm Bill, including the [permanent reauthorization of stewardship contracting](#) and the nationwide expansion of “good neighbor” authority. Bennet has long advocated for a smarter approach to handling wildfires that invests more in mitigation work to reduce the future costs associated with suppression efforts. He chaired a [subcommittee hearing](#) last November entitled “Shortchanging Our Forests: How Tight Budgets and Management Decisions Can Increase the Risk of Wildfire” to discuss the issue further. Bennet has called for the [modernization of our air tanker fleet](#) and worked with Udall to include authorization for the purchase of five modern [air tankers](#) in the Farm Bill.

Udall, a senior member of the U.S. Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee, has [championed common-sense programs and strategies to prevent western wildfires](#). Udall, a senior member of the U.S. Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee, has [led efforts to ensure Colorado has the tools it needs to reduce fuel loads on U.S. Forest Service land](#) and turn the problem of beetle-killed trees into [energy](#) and [jobs](#). Udall also first introduced [the Insect and Disease Emergency Act](#) in 2009 — many of whose provisions were included in the 2014 Farm Bill. He recently [introduced bipartisan legislation to allow the Federal Emergency Management Agency to proactively work with states and localities on wildfire mitigation projects](#) and is [a lead sponsor of the bipartisan Wildfire Disaster Funding Act of 2013](#), a common-sense provision that treats wildfires as the extraordinary measures they are and ends the destructive cycle of fire-borrowing that can undermine ongoing prevention efforts.

In response to Fires in Colorado, Bennet and Udall [successfully urged President Obama](#) to designate the Black Forest and Royal Gorge Fires as major disaster areas and pushed the Small Business Administration to quickly approve a disaster declaration for the West Fork Fire Complex. They were also instrumental in securing [Emergency Watershed Protection funds](#) for areas affected by the High Park and Waldo Canyon fires.