

OPINION: Logging Our Forests is Not the Best Way to Prevent Wildfire Risks

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*This op-ed by Josh Schlossberg appeared on **Colorado Newsline** on **August 12, 2025**.*

Whenever an “emergency” is declared by our government — whether it’s in the name of public safety, public health, or pretty much any other reason — many Coloradans on either side of the political aisle are skeptical, as are a lot of journalists, and even some elected officials.

Sometimes the increased government control may be justified, other times not so much. But every time emergency measures are proposed, the instinct of most

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Coloradans has been to investigate the facts, for fear of yet another power grab.

Oddly, there's one government "emergency" that an alarming number of citizens, media outlets, and elected officials across the political spectrum not only won't investigate... will not only will attack or censor anyone questioning... but will promote outright disinformation around it to ensure a lack of transparency or accountability.

That "emergency"? Wildfire.

What is it about the fear of wildfire that cuts off rational thinking, despite it only killing about 500 people since 1990 in the U.S., an average of 14 people per year?

While every death from wildfire is of course a tragedy, the most credible threat is home loss, firefighting expenses, and costs of rebuilding. Luckily, the overwhelming scientific consensus points to home hardening and defensible space pruning up to 100 feet around houses as the most effective way to save homes and lives.

While there has been some small progress on home hardening in Colorado, the vast majority of funding and conversation around wildfire is still focused on cutting down vast swaths of public forests in the name of "community protection."

Surely, if we're spending millions of taxpayer dollars on "wildfire fuel reduction" logging while gutting environmental laws to push through even more... including rescinding the Roadless Rule, "emergency" logging authorization across 112 million acres of National Forests, and what appears to be the largest logging project in Colorado history, the "Lower North-South Vegetation Management" in Pike National Forest southwest of Denver... that's because there's no doubt that cutting forests keeps our homes from burning... right?

At least, that's what you've been told by those carrying out or financially benefiting from "fuel reduction" logging on public lands. But the truth is the science is at best conflicted — at worst, shows such logging can increase the likelihood of homes burning — evidence many of these entities privately acknowledge but publicly deny.



Forest Fire Malfeasance, the new report from Eco-Integrity Alliance, uncovers how the unprecedented scale of cutting biodiverse, carbon-storing forests in Colorado is in part the result of an effort to mislead citizens, elected officials, and media through the bad-faith denial, misrepresentation, and dismissal of peer-reviewed science and community concerns while scientists and citizen advocates are publicly smeared and defamed as disreputable.

Hundreds of emails from a Colorado Open Records Act request show evidence of Jefferson County commissioners and Open Space staff working with 23 government officials, land management agencies, logging industry trade groups, a university, and other entities to push through thousands of acres of controversial “fuel reduction” logging in Colorado public forests.

One such email from federally-funded Colorado Forest Restoration Institute at Colorado State University to U.S. Forest Service’s Pike National Forest, and forwarded through Jefferson County Open Space, privately acknowledges that abundant science contests the efficacy of “wildfire fuel reduction,” and that the agencies “overpromise” results from such cutting, while advising to never admit this to the public or media.

A quote:

“There are numerous studies demonstrating both effectiveness and lack of effectiveness of forest density reduction (‘forest thinning’) projects on altering fire behavior and effects. Engaging in toe-to-toe trench warfare with competing science papers would result in stalemate — and win for the opponents.”

Other emails show land management agencies and logging industry trade groups providing provably false information and defaming ecological advocates to reporters to (often successfully) convince outlets to not report on the story.

Sadly, the consequences of these policies are not simply harm to forest ecosystems, watersheds, wildlife populations including endangered species, carbon-storage, and recreational opportunities. Ironically, the outcome is a likely increase in community vulnerability to wildfire through widespread tree removal.

This practice dries out and heats up the forest microclimate and opens stands to



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wind, which can rapidly spread flames, potentially overwhelming evacuees and firefighters — while commandeering taxpayer dollars and attention away from the only actions scientifically proven to protect communities: home hardening and defensible space pruning up to 100 feet around structures.

Josh Schlossberg is a Boulder County resident living adjacent to the Roosevelt National Forest, award-winning investigative journalist and science writer, and Colorado Advocate for Eco-Integrity Alliance.

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