



## B 2025 001

### EXECUTIVE ORDER

#### Protecting Front Range Communities and Forests through Creation of the Ponderosa Mountain Pine Beetle Task Force

Pursuant to the authority vested in the Governor of the State of Colorado and, in particular, pursuant to Article IV, Section 2 of the Colorado Constitution, I, Jared Polis, Governor of the State of Colorado, hereby issue this Executive Order protecting Front Range communities and forests through creation of the Ponderosa Mountain Pine Beetle Task Force.

#### **I. Background and Purpose**

The 2025 aerial detection of forest health, conducted by the U.S. Forest Service and Colorado State Forest Service, highlighted an outbreak of mountain pine beetle (*Dendroctonus ponderosae*) and expanding pockets of beetle-killed trees along the Front Range, particularly visible along the U.S. Highway 285 and I-70 corridors. These analyses indicate the beginning of a major medium-term increase of mountain pine beetle effects within Front Range ponderosa forests. Warming climates and drought have created optimal environmental conditions for the beetles to spread into neighboring trees. With the low temperatures necessary to abate the beetles' progress unlikely and prolonged dry conditions weakening the trees' defenses, a very high level of tree mortality, especially among ponderosa pines, is likely to continue for the next decade. Preparing for this reality is vital for a vibrant and safe Colorado now and in the future.

The effects of mountain pine beetles on trees compound over time, shifting the risk profiles of affected areas as the outbreak evolves. Beetle-caused mortality can create public safety hazards, alter fire behavior, and make fire suppression even more challenging for firefighters. Standing dead and falling trees pose a risk to infrastructure, such as roads, trails, power lines, and recreation sites, as well as the people who access them. The increased fire risk and tree mortality, combined with the high population and infrastructure density on the Front Range, is not just a concern for forest health – it is a public safety, water quality, recreation, and economic issue. With private, county, state, and federal land within the outbreak zone, working together across jurisdictions and sectors is essential to addressing the outbreak.

While this outbreak poses notable challenges because of its overlay with an area of high population density, this is not Colorado's first pine beetle outbreak and it will not be its last. The State is acting quickly to prepare our response now before the outbreak progresses too far,

drawing on our extensive experience from prior outbreaks. Through collaboration across key sectors, innovative thinking from leading experts, proactive attention, and inclusion of a diversity of perspectives, Colorado can improve resilience, protect key sectors, establish innovative solutions, and prepare communities and landowners for the long-term challenges brought by this outbreak. This Executive Order creates a framework for this coordination and collaboration by establishing the Ponderosa Mountain Pine Beetle Task Force.

## **II. Mission and Scope**

The Ponderosa Mountain Pine Beetle Task Force (Task Force) shall build upon the progress and work of the Forest Health Council, the Colorado Fire Commission, and former Northern Bark Beetle Collaborative. It shall also gain insight from the 2020 Colorado Forest Action Plan, the National Cohesive Wildland Fire Management Strategy (with a focus on Resilient Landscapes, Fire Adapted Communities, and Safe and Effective Wildfire Response), and relevant recommendations of the Federal Wildfire Mitigation and Management Commission. The Task Force will provide an urgent, action-oriented, and timely complement to these efforts specific to the needs and challenges associated with this outbreak.

The Task Force shall coordinate across key sectors, including state and local government, landowners, philanthropy, and private industry, as well as with subject matter experts, and use collaborative problem solving to advance adaptation outcomes, resilient communities, and enhanced fire preparedness and response, as well as develop tools and solutions, in response to the spread of mountain pine beetles in ponderosa pine on the Front Range.

The Task Force shall:

- A. Promote collaboration and innovation among key sectors to advance focused, action-oriented outcomes drawing on the diversity of needs and perspectives from across the affected areas;
- B. Create communications and public education tools to inform the public, property owners, and communities on the Front Range of the mountain pine beetle outbreak, opportunities for action to protect high-value trees, and existing resources;
- C. Coordinate and collaborate across the governmental sector to support the maximum effectiveness and efficiency of state, local, and federal resources, incentives, and processes;

- D. Engage local and county government partners across the affected areas early to inform the work plan, scoping, and Task Force deliberations to ensure local needs and perspectives are incorporated;
- E. Determine which recommendations of the Federal Wildfire Mitigation and Management Commission are suitable for implementation at the state or local level to address the mountain pine beetle outbreak;
- F. Evaluate protection, prevention, and investment strategies related to watersheds and water and utility providers;
- G. Collaborate across sectors to advance state, local, and private planning and partnerships for reforestation efforts, seeking to improve forest health through promoting strategic age and species diversity, silviculture, and research in coordination with the Colorado State Nursery;
- H. Integrate key considerations like conservation and outdoor recreation needs and opportunities, tourism and local economic drivers, natural climate solutions, climate adaptation and resilience outcomes, wildlife habitat and connectivity and other associated priorities into the efforts of the Task Force where appropriate;
- I. Study timber markets and systems and experimental or innovative opportunities in the forestry sector and develop solutions for gaps or barriers to address economic variables of beetle-kill wood, wood processing, and transportation needs and opportunities to advance efficiencies for fuels mitigation;
- J. Evaluate opportunities to advance wildfire detection, suppression, recovery, and innovation, particularly within the affected areas;
- K. Aggressively pursue opportunities to advance or use relevant research and capacity to impede beetle spread, including research and scaling production of natural predators conducted by the Colorado State Insectary;
- L. Identify methods and types of training for the Colorado fire, forestry, and landscape workforce to address the effects of mountain pine beetles;
- M. Review existing and explore new funding strategies to address identified short, medium and long term priorities;
- N. Develop insurance strategies to address the impacts to fire risk in Colorado as a result of the outbreak; and

- O. Pursue other areas of inquiry related to the mountain pine beetle outbreak, as determined by the Task Force members.

### **III. Membership**

- A. The Task Force shall have up to twenty (20) members, and include but not be limited to members of federal, state, and local governments, utilities, nonprofits, philanthropies, and the private sector.
- B. The Executive Director of the Colorado Department of Natural Resources, the State Forester of the Colorado State Forest Service, and the Director of the Colorado Division of Fire Prevention and Control, or their designees, shall co-chair the Task Force. The Task Force shall also have staff support from the Colorado Department of Natural Resources, Colorado State Forest Service, and Colorado Division of Fire Prevention and Control.
- C. The Governor may appoint members of the Task Force from the following entities and these members shall serve at the pleasure of the Governor. Members may include but are not limited to:
  - 1. Bicameral and bipartisan representation from the Colorado General Assembly, ideally from affected areas. These appointments will be made in consultation with House and Senate Majority and Minority Leadership;
  - 2. Representation from Colorado's federal delegation with affected districts or territories;
  - 3. Representation from the U.S. Department of Agriculture, including the U.S. Forest Service and Natural Resource Conservation Service, as well as the U.S. Department of the Interior, including the Bureau of Land Management and National Park Service; and
  - 4. Representation from other state agencies as deemed necessary
- D. The remaining members of the Task Force shall be appointed by the Executive Director of Colorado Department of Natural Resources and serve at the pleasure of the Executive Director. In making these appointments, the Executive Director shall consult with the co-chairs and seek to balance a mix of subject matter experts and perspectives relevant to the Task Force's mission and scope from the following entities:

1. Representation from the Colorado Fire Commission and Colorado Forest Health Council;
  2. Representation of affected local governments and local government assets such as parks and open space;
  3. Representation from the fire prevention and emergency response fields, such as the Colorado State Fire Chiefs;
  4. Representation of electric, water, and other utility providers servicing the Front Range;
  5. Representation from key private sector entities, including housing, timber, recreation and tourism, and transportation;
  6. Representation from the non-governmental sector with expertise in ecosystems, conservation, and wildlife associated with affected areas;
  7. Representation from the philanthropic sector working on issues related to forest health, wildfire preparedness, and community resilience;
  8. Representation from agriculture, rangeland management, or other lands affected by the outbreak; and
  9. Representation from other entities with necessary expertise on or experience with mountain pine beetle, forest resiliency, wildfire, and community safety and preparedness.
- E. The co-chairs may invite other state entities to participate in an ex-officio or ad-hoc advisory role as relevant to the Task Force's work, which may include but is not limited to, the Colorado Department of Public Safety, Colorado Water Conservation Board, Colorado Parks and Wildlife, Colorado Division of Insurance, Colorado Department of Agriculture (including the Colorado State Insectary), Colorado Tourism Office, Colorado Outdoor Recreation Industry Office, Serve Colorado, Office of Climate Preparedness and Disaster Recovery, Public Utilities Commission, Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment, and Colorado Department of Local Affairs.
- F. Task Force members not employed by the State shall not be construed as employees or agents of the State.

**IV. Timeline and Deliverables**

- A. The Governor and Executive Director of the Colorado Department of Natural Resources, in consultation with the co-chairs, shall complete the appointments to the Task Force no later than February 1, 2026.
- B. The Executive Director of the Colorado Department of Natural Resources, in consultation with the co-chairs, shall retain a facilitator for the Task Force no later than March 1, 2026. Any costs associated with the Task Force shall be funded from the Healthy Forests Vibrant Communities Cash Fund.
- C. Executive Director of the Colorado Department of Natural Resources, in consultation with the co-chairs, will create a preliminary work plan and organizational structure for the Task Force no later than March 1, 2026.
- D. The Task Force shall create a comprehensive work plan no later than June 30, 2026, which should include goals and planned actions for the short, medium, and long term. The development of this plan should not delay efforts across agencies prior to June 30, 2026.
- E. The Task Force shall provide, at a minimum, annual updates regarding the Task Force's work to the Governor, the Colorado Fire Commission, the Forest Health Council, the Colorado General Assembly, relevant state agency heads, and other entities as determined by the co-chairs, beginning no later than December 1, 2026.
- F. The Task Force shall produce an annual report for local governments and the public describing key activities, needs, and opportunities identified by the Task Force.

**V. Further Endeavors**

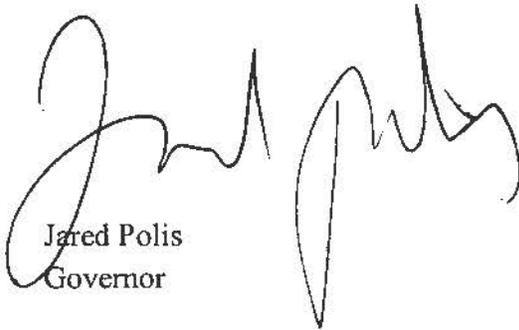
The Governor encourages all local, state, and federal entities to go above and beyond to address this outbreak and to act with urgency within their respective abilities and independent of this Task Force, as well as collaboratively through this Task Force.

**VI. Duration**

This Executive Order shall remain in effect for three (3) years unless modified or rescinded by future Executive Order of the Governor.



GIVEN under my hand and the  
Executive Seal of the State of  
Colorado this fifteenth  
day of December, 2025.



Jared Polis  
Governor