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Transcription of Forest management: creating resilient forests for
Colorado

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BEGIN TRANSCRIPTION

00:00:13:19 - 00:00:49:18

Unknown

Colorado offers nearly 25 million acres of forest land. But as forests provide countless benefits, including fresh water, clean air, wildlife habitat, wood products and many forms of outdoor recreation, but our forests also face numerous challenges and in recent years have presented increasing risks to Colorado's citizens and visitors. Because our forests were generally mature and over mature, what you're seeing is a lot of insect disease and fire events all coming together with the right weather conditions where it's drier, dense forests.

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And so you're having insect disease and fire at at really an epidemic level across the landscape. The length of the tree is 17.7. To address these threats, it's critical to monitor changing forest conditions to effectively manage the state's forests. The Colorado State Forest Service, the United States Forest Service, and other agencies and organizations work together to track ongoing insect and disease concerns and other trends in forest health.

00:01:17:24 - 00:01:44:11

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We've got numerous things that we do through our 19 field offices. We have people on the ground every year that are that are looking at forest conditions, working with private landowners, cooperating with other agencies. We do an annual forest health report where we cooperate with the U.S. Forest Service to do an aerial survey of Colorado's forest to where we can track conditions and trends.

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The other thing that we're doing is about 11 years ago, we started a continuing forest inventory and analysis program in Colorado. It's run by the US Forest Service in Colorado is one of the states to where we

actually use our personnel to do the field plots. Every ten years, those plots will be revisited. So we have not only a way to show what our current forest condition is, but to monitor the trends across Colorado, which is really critical in helping us plan for future management actions.

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Private landowners, with the help of the Colorado State Forest Service, also have a major role to play in shaping the health of Colorado's forests. We have 7 million acres of forest in this state that are nonfederal forest, and that the last count, that's 184,000 landowners. And that's not counting all the communities you deal with. So there is quite a bit of private forest land in the state of Colorado.

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Some of the most visible threats on the state's federal, private and other forest lands in recent decades have been the bark beetle epidemics that have impacted millions of acres. We can't tell if we've ever had this bad of a mountain pine beetle outbreak in the past, because the evidence disappears over time, but certainly within recorded history, this is the worst we have ever seen.

00:03:04:06 - 00:03:26:13

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Beetles have always been around their natural part of our forest ecosystem, but what we haven't seen as much in the last century is the scale to which they've affected the national forest, and the scale and scope of the beetle situation now far exceeds anyone's ability to address it. And so working very collaboratively and collectively together, it's going to be very important.

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Insect concerns in Colorado ranged from bark beetles in subalpine forests to insects in pinyon juniper woodlands and urban settings. We've had everything from our low elevation pinyon pine forests all the way up now to where we're seeing spruce beetle in our high elevation forest. Recently, we just detected emerald ash borer in our urban and community forest. So because of our condition, the drier climate that we've experienced, we're seeing issues basically across the landscape.

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The health of Colorado's urban and community forests is also a concern. The trees on Colorado's eastern plains, in small towns and the largest cities are now being threatened by perhaps the most destructive tree pest. Colorado has faced emerald ash borer. After years of interagency monitoring efforts, the invasive pest was detected for the first time in Colorado in September 2013.

00:04:23:13 - 00:04:48:09

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In Boulder. A big threat now in Colorado is the emerald ash borer. Emerald ash borer is a non-native insect to the United States, so it's really wreaked havoc and killed millions of ash trees in the upper Midwest. Urban forests not only add to quality of life, they also provide shade and reduce energy costs, cleanse the air, and help with stormwater management.

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With ash trees making up 15% or more of all community trees in Colorado, the emerald ash borer represents a serious concern. Agencies such as the Colorado State Forest Service are working hard to make sure the public is aware of this threat. We're currently looking at the extent, how many trees it's impacted, and we're very concerned that this could start spreading through the Denver metro area in the northern Front Range communities, where ash is a big component of the urban forest.

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While emerald ash borer is a growing threat in urban areas, other communities in Colorado are now dealing with the added threat of flooding following intense wildfire. One of the other things we know about big fires is that we have big flooding, big post-fire runoff, sediment leaves in the immediate aftermath of the fire, and the ash flows clean up and some of those constituents go away.

00:05:43:11 - 00:06:16:25

Unknown

But we have massive sediment and erosion into the watersheds. That affects a number of points. One thing is it goes downstream and gets into big reservoirs and dams and fills these with sediment that takes away our water storage capacity. This post-fire flooding issue, in my opinion, is as big or bigger than the actual fires themselves. Overlay dense forests lead to more intense fires, and more intense fires create water repellent soils.

00:06:16:28 - 00:06:50:16

Unknown

So now we have forests that are unhealthy. We have to adopt management, and we have to do these projects to try and return them to help so that we reduce the size and scale of the fires and so that we reduce the after fire watershed impacts. We depend in large part for our economy related to forest health and recreation, our forests, our our watersheds, where we derive the vast majority of the water resources for the state of Colorado.

00:06:50:22 - 00:06:59:09

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Colorado statewide outstanding tree farm by the Colorado State Tree Farm Committee.

00:06:59:11 - 00:07:23:26

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In Colorado. There are many advocates of forest health who work to protect water supplies, reduce the impacts of wildfires, insects, and disease, and restore healthy forests. Some of the most dedicated are tree farmers, private landowners who voluntarily work with the Colorado State Forest Service to grow renewable resources while protecting environmental benefits and increasing public understanding of sustainable forestry.

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Unknown

Oftentimes, these efforts on a larger scale start with one landowner or one champion for the cause, just like a wildfire will grow from a spark. And the tree farm program and the Forest AG program, they both enable those sparks to get started in the community. For many years now, Bill Silva has been harvesting timber from his land in La Plata County and crafting and selling various wood products.

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We make tables and Spanish Colonial style furniture, bed sets, dining room sets, living room furniture. Silva has noticed that over time his forest is much healthier. We also have seen trees that have been attacked by the bark beetle and resist the bark beetle. As a result of being healthier and more capable of fighting off those beetles with a natural way.

00:08:17:25 - 00:08:47:05

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There's no pesticides involved. They're simply drowning those pests with their own own sap, and they have the ability to do that because they're healthier. Near Westcliff in Custer County, another private landowner, Douglas Schultz, is dedicated to managing the forest on his land. We have way too many trees. The density level is much too high, and so the trees are having to compete with each other so much for nutrients and moisture and even sunlight.

00:08:47:08 - 00:09:09:15

Unknown

With advice from the Colorado State Forest Service, Schultz's achieving a healthier forest and reducing wildfire risk. We're able to go in and selectively take out the weaker trees, and you end up with a beautiful forest and a much healthier force and much better for animal habitat.

00:09:09:18 - 00:09:42:23

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Attaining healthier forests means not just selectively cutting trees, but also planting new ones. The nursery at the Colorado State Forest Service, headquartered in Fort Collins, grows more than 800,000 seedlings every year. Our mission is stewardship of Colorado's diverse forest environments, so the seedlings that you see are ones that will use in everything from reforestation of burned areas to forest improvement projects, to even windbreaks, shelter belts and living snow fences on the plains.

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In 2011, the track fire moved from New Mexico into southern Colorado and burned 13,000 acres of ponderosa pine forest to help with the first few years of recovery. Many volunteers join the State Forest Service to plant seedlings from the nursery. The ponderosa pine just isn't regenerating naturally on its own, so we're trying to give some ponderosa pine seedlings a head start here, get them in the ground, and hope that some ponderosa pine establishes in the area, since that's the forest type that was here previous to the fire.

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Our forests are dynamic and will continue to change through active forest management. We can improve forest health, reduce wildfire risk, and supply forest products. But we must act now because the most effective way to reduce the impacts of future forest threats is to address them before they arrive. If we're going to affect the health of our forest, it's something that, first of all, has to be a priority for society because, again, keep in mind what our forest do for us with clean water, clean air, carbon recreation, forest products, all those important things that our forests bring us.

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They're absolutely critical for the quality of life in this state. So I think we're all going to have to work together to acknowledge these problems and workforce solutions.

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