

sacrifices in his personal life to continue his Olympic dreams. He moved away from loved ones in Florida to continue his training in Utah. While some athletes are able to concentrate solely on their sport, Derek has continued to work part-time in order to pay the bills. And he has experienced the breakup of his marriage. Additionally, Derek is now 35, which is young for most of us but old for a champion skater.

Yet, through all the challenges both on and off the ice, Derek earned a spot on the 2006 Olympic team and the opportunity to again represent the United States. He skated in two events: the team pursuit competition and the 1,500-meter race, in which he had set a world record on his way to gold 4 years ago. This time, however, he did not match his success in the 2002 Games—no medals, no world records.

Instead, Derek skated for the joy of competition and the thrill of representing his country on the world stage one more time. He skated for his daughter, Mia Elizabeth, who turned 4 years old in December, with the hope that she will remember watching him race against the world's best. He skated because he loves to skate and because he is proud to be an American athlete.

Having accomplished his goals, Derek is ready to retire next month, following a competition in the Netherlands. Quietly, a world away from his glorious achievements of 2002, he will hang up his skates and end his competitive career.

But Derek Parra will not be forgotten. His story will continue to inspire young people, those who dream of Olympic gold and more generally those who have big ambitions despite long odds against them. He has broken down barriers in his striving for greatness—and he has done it all with determination and dignity.

Thank you, Derek, for allowing us to share in your dreams for so long. With great appreciation and admiration I repeat what I said 4 years ago: San Bernardino is proud of you. Mexican Americans are proud of you. All Americans are proud of you. You are our hero. God bless you.

ROCKY MOUNTAIN FOREST INSECTS RESPONSE ENHANCEMENT AND SUPPORT ACT (ROCKY MOUNTAIN FIRES ACT)

HON. MARK UDALL

OF COLORADO

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, March 2, 2006

Mr. UDALL of Colorado. Mr. Speaker, with my Colorado colleague, Representative JOHN SALAZAR, I today am introducing a bill to help protect Rocky Mountain communities from the increased risks of severe wildfire caused by large-scale infestations of bark beetles and other insects in our forests.

Entitled the Rocky Mountain Forest Insects Response Enhancement and Support—or Rocky Mountain FIRES—Act, the bill will provide the Forest Service and Interior Department with more tools and resources to respond to this serious problem.

In Colorado and other Rocky Mountain states, the risk of severe wildfires is very real. Partly, this is because of drought. But there are other contributing factors. One is that for

many years, the federal government's policy emphasized fire suppression, even though fire is an inescapable part of the ecology of western forests like those in Colorado. Today, in many parts of the forests there is an accumulation of underbrush and thick stands of small diameter trees that is greater than would be the case if there had been more, smaller fires over the years. They provide the extra fuel that can turn a small fire into an intense inferno. The problem has been made worse by our growing population and increasing development in the places where communities meet the forests—the so-called “urban interface.” And when you add the effects of widespread infestations of insects, you have a recipe for even worse to come.

I have put a priority on reducing the wildfire risks to our communities since I was elected to Congress. In 2000, with my colleague, Representative HEFLEY, I introduced legislation to facilitate reducing the buildup of fuel in the parts of Colorado that the Forest Service, working with state and local partners, identified at greatest risk of fire—the so-called “red zones.”

Concepts from that legislation were included in the National Fire Plan developed by the Clinton Administration and were also incorporated into the Healthy Forests Restoration Act of 2003. As a Member of the Resources Committee, I had worked to develop the version of that legislation that the committee approved in 2002, and while I could not support the different version initially passed by the House in 2003, I voted for the revised version developed in conference with the Senate later that year—the version that President Bush signed into law.

Since 2003 welcome progress has been made—in Colorado, at least—in developing community wildfire protection plans and focusing fuel-reduction projects in the priority “red zone” areas, two important aspects of the new law.

But at the same time nature has continued to add to the buildup of fuel in the form of both new growth and dead and dying mature trees.

This has resulted from a variety of reasons, including the fact that dense stands of even-aged trees (one result of decades of fire suppression and reduced logging) are stressed by the competition for nutrients. This stress, which has been intensified by the effects of the drought that has plagued the west for nearly a decade, makes these stands less able to resist insects.

Many species of bark beetles, such as the mountain pine beetle, are native to our forests. These insects fly to a tree—typically one that may be weakened by age, disease or lack of water and nutrients—where they burrow through the bark. If the tree is healthy, it can defend itself through the production of sap to repel and expel the invading insect. If the insect is successful, it lays its eggs in the woody material below the bark. Once the eggs hatch, they feed on the tree's fiber and disrupt the flow of water and nutrients from the tree's roots to its needles and branches. In addition, the insects bring in fungi and other invaders that further damage the tree. If enough insects are able to penetrate the tree and lay eggs, the tree dies. The offspring then mature and leave the tree flying to the next tree and the cycle begins anew.

These insects and the cycles they engender are a natural component of forest ecosystems.

They help to balance tree densities and set the stage for fires and thereby the generation of new tree growth. When forests are healthy and there are adequate supplies of water, the effects of insects are relatively low-scale and isolated. But under the right conditions—such as during drought conditions or when there are dense stands of even aged trees—the insects can cause large-scale tree mortality, turning whole mountainsides and valleys rust red.

That is what has been happening in many mountainous areas in Colorado. For example, in the Fraser and upper Colorado River Valleys north of the Winter Park Ski area, the insect epidemic has decimated wide swaths of forests. Most alarmingly, areas around populated communities in these valleys from Winter Park all the way up to the west side of Rocky Mountain National Park are living with acres of dead trees, turned rust red by the insects and creating intense concern of a catastrophic wildfire that could race through these landscapes and communities.

To learn more, last year I convened a meeting in Winter Park, in Grand County, that was attended by more than 200 people, including local elected officials, homeowners, timber industry representatives, Forest Service officials, ski area employees, and other Coloradans. They offered observations on the extent of this problem and proffered suggestions on ways to better respond to it.

Based on that meeting and other conversations, draft legislation was developed that Representative SALAZAR and I circulated widely so we could obtain further comments and suggestions. The bill we are introducing today reflects much of what we heard from Coloradans and others interested in this subject.

Our goal is not to eradicate insects in our forests—nor should it be, because insects are a natural part of forest ecosystems. Instead, our intention is to make it possible for there to be more rapid responses to the insect epidemic in those areas where such responses are needed in order to protect communities from increased wildfire dangers.

The bill would add a new section to the Healthy Forests Act to specifically address insect epidemics like those now visible in the Fraser and upper Colorado River Valleys. It would apply to the entire Rocky Mountain west. It would authorize the Forest Service to identify as “insect emergency areas” Federal lands that have already been slated for fuel-reduction work in community wildfire protection plans and that have so many insect-killed trees that there is an urgent need for work to reduce the fire-related risks to human life and property or municipal water supplies. The Forest Service could make such a determination on its own initiative or in response to a request from any State agency or any political subdivision (such as a county, city, or other local government) of a State. If the Forest Service receives such a request, it must make a decision in response within 90 days. A designation must be made by a Regional Forester or higher-ranking official of the Forest Service.

In these emergency areas, the Forest Service or Interior Department would be authorized to remove dead or dying trees on an expedited basis, including use of a “categorical exclusion” from normal review under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA).

Although categorical exclusions from NEPA are controversial, I believe they are appropriate for these emergency situations. And because recent lawsuits have led to some confusion about the relationship of Forest Service categorical exclusions and the Appeals Reform Act, the bill would exempt such categorically-excluded projects in insect emergency areas from the Appeals Reform Act. This would make it clear that the projects categorically excluded in an insect emergency situation would not need to go through additional steps in order to enhance the rapid use of such categorically excluded projects.

As the focus of the bill is on the potential fire threats to communities from insect-killed trees and the encouragement of treatment projects in the "community wildfire protection plan" areas, the bill also includes provisions to help communities establish such plans.

Toward that end, the bill includes language to make clear that development of protection plans qualifies for assistance under the Federal Fire Protection and Control Act. And, more importantly, the bill provides that annually for the next five years \$5 million will be diverted from the federal government's share of royalties for onshore federal oil and gas resources and made available to help Rocky Mountain communities develop their protection plans.

At the meeting in Winter Park last fall, I also heard concerns from private landowners who are doing what they can to reduce fuel loads, cut down insect-killed trees, and otherwise mitigate the fire risks on their lands.

Because some of them would like to be able to do similar work on adjacent National Forest lands, the bill makes clear that the Forest Service can award them stewardship contract or enter into agreements authorizing them to do that carry out fuel-reduction work on those lands, subject to terms and conditions set by the Forest Service. Those arrangements could provide for reimbursement by the government for their work, and the bill specifies that if their work is not reimbursed, it will be treated as a donation to the government for income-tax purposes, meaning it is deductible from income tax by people who itemize their deductions.

The bill would also encourage the Forest Service to establish "central collection points" where trees and other vegetative material could be deposited and made available for further uses as fuel or products.

Also at the Winter Park meeting, I heard that there are some barriers to the private sector in doing the treatment work on Forest Service land. So, the bill would allow the Forest Service to extend the length of time for stewardship contracts for thinning work in insect-emergency areas by as much as an additional 5 years beyond the current 10 year limit.

This could help attract more entities willing to do the needed treatment work in these emergency areas, as could another part of the bill that would allow people carrying out fuel-reduction projects in insect-emergency areas to exclude up to \$10,000 (\$20,000 for joint returns) from the amount of their income subject to federal income tax.

Finally, as trees removed to reduce fuel loads or respond to an insect emergency may have some value as a fuel, the bill would authorize the Forest Service to make grants to owners or operators of facilities that convert the removed trees and other vegetative material into energy.

Although we cannot and should not eradicate insects from our forests, we can and we should strive to help reduce the increased wildfire risks to communities that result from their increased infestations. The purpose of this bill is to provide some additional tools and resources that will enable relevant federal agencies, local communities, and residents of the Rocky Mountain region to better respond to this problem. For the benefit of our colleague, I am attaching a short outline of the bill's provisions.

The bill has 8 sections, as follows:

Section One—provides a short title and table of contents. The short title is "Rocky Mountain Forest Insects Response Enhancement and Support (or Rocky Mountain FIRES) Act."

Section Two—sets forth finding regarding the need for the legislation, and states the bill's purpose, which is to facilitate a swifter response by the Forest Service and Interior Department to reduce the increased risk of severe wildfires to communities in the Rocky Mountain regions caused by the effects of widespread infestations of bark beetles and other insects.

Section Three—amends the Healthy Forests Restoration Act to: Add definitions of terms; Require that in the Rocky Mountain region at least 70% of the funds allocated for hazardous fuel reduction projects be used for projects in the wildland-urban interface and lands near municipal water supplies or their tributaries that have been identified for treatment in a community wildfire protection plan; Provide for designation of insect-emergency areas by the Forest Service; Specify the effect of designation of insect-emergency areas; Specifically authorize the Forest Service to relocate or reassign personnel to respond to an insect emergency; Clarify the relationship of this part of the bill and the Appeals Reform Act; (The bill defines "Rocky Mountain region" as Arizona, Colorado, Idaho, Montana, New Mexico, North Dakota, South Dakota, Utah, and Wyoming.)

Section Four—amends Healthy Forests Restoration Act to authorize help to communities preparing or revising wildfire protection plans, and provides for annual diversion (for five years) of \$5 million from federal share of royalties from onshore federal oil and gas developments to fund this assistance.

Section Five—amends Federal Fire Prevention and Control Act of 1974 to clarify that development of community wildfire protection plans qualifies for assistance under that Act.

Section Six—amends biomass-grant provision of Healthy Forests Restoration Act to allow grants to facilities using biomass for wood-based products or other commercial purposes (in addition to uses now specified in the Act); to require that priority go to grants to people using biomass removed from insect-emergency areas; to increase authorization to \$10 million annually through 2010 (instead of \$5 million annually through 2008); and to provide for establishment of central collection points for material removed from forest lands as part of hazardous-fuel reduction projects.

Section Seven—amends the Healthy Forests Restoration Act to specifically authorize Forest Service and Interior Department to award stewardship contracts to owners of lands contiguous to Federal lands (or enter into agreements with such landowners) so the

landowners can do fuel-reduction work on the Federal lands and either be reimbursed for such work or authorized to treat value of such work as a donation to the United States for purposes of federal income taxes.

Section Eight—amends Internal Revenue Code to exclude from taxable income up to \$10,000 (\$20,000 for joint return) received from the Federal government as compensation for work done in the Rocky Mountain Region as part of an authorized hazardous-fuel reduction project or a silvicultural assessment done under section 404 of the Healthy Forests Restoration Act.

TRIBUTE TO RETIRING GENERAL LANCE W. LORD

HON. IKE SKELTON

OF MISSOURI

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, March 2, 2006

Mr. SKELTON. Mr. Speaker, let me take this opportunity to recognize the long and distinguished career of General Lance W. Lord. General Lord is retiring after serving in our nation's Air Force with distinction for over 37 years.

General Lord received a Bachelor of Science in education from Otterbein College in Ohio, where he entered the Reserve Officer Training Corps Program. He earned a Master's degree in industrial management from the University of North Dakota, Grand Forks. He also attended the Squadron Officer School, Air Command and Staff College, and the Air War College at Maxwell Air Force Base.

After entering the Air Force in 1969, General Lord served four years of Minuteman II ICBM alert duty. He was the Director of the Ground-Launched Cruise Missile Program Management Office in West Germany and he was the Commander of two ICBM wings in Wyoming and North Dakota. At Vandenberg Air Force Base in California he commanded a space wing responsible for satellite launch and ballistic missile test launch operations. He led Air Force Education as the Commander of Air University at Maxwell Air Force Base and was the Assistant Vice Chief of Staff for the Headquarters U.S. Air Force. Since 2002, General Lord has been the Commander of the Air Force Space Command at Peterson Air Force Base in Colorado, where he has been responsible for the development, acquisition, and operation of the Air Force's space and missile systems.

General Lord has earned numerous decorations and badges for his outstanding efforts in the military. These decorations and badges include a Legion of Merit with two oak leaf clusters, a Meritorious Service Medal with oak leaf cluster, an Air Force Commendation Medal, an Air Force Outstanding Unit Award with oak leaf cluster, an Air Force Organizational Excellence with two oak leaf clusters, a Combat Readiness Medal, and a National Defense Service Medal with two bronze stars. He also has received many honors, including the Secretary of the Air Force Leadership Award from Air War College at Maxwell Air Force Base, the General Jimmy Doolittle Fellow Award from the Air Force Association, and the Space Champion Award from the National Defense Industrial Association.

Mr. Speaker, I know the Members of the House will join me in paying tribute to General