



Board of County Commissioners

970-328-8605

970-328-8629(f)

eagleadmin@eaglecounty.us

www.eaglecounty.us

May 22, 2023

The Honorable Joe Neguse
United States House of Representatives
1419 Longworth HOB
Washington DC, 20515

Dear Representative Neguse,

Federal lands comprise 84% of Eagle County. With very little private lands for affordable workforce housing development, Eagle County is in a crisis. We seek creative solutions to relieve this pressure, such as leasing land from the Forest Service, as authorized in the Farm Bill.

As the Farm Bill comes up for reauthorization, Eagle County requests that you support partnerships between local communities and the U.S. Forest Service for redevelopment opportunities, including affordable housing, on Forest Service lands.

We support the efforts of our neighbors, including the City of Aspen, the Roaring Fork Transportation Authority, Colorado Mountain College, Pitkin County, Aspen Valley Hospital, and Aspen School District as they collaborate with the White River National Forest staff to develop new facilities, including workforce housing. These facilities and housing units will meet the needs for the Forest Service and government service providers in the Roaring Fork Valley.

Eagle County also has been in conversations to discuss leasing opportunities for workforce housing in the community. Eagle County requests that the 2023 Farm Bill include clarifying language that defines lease term lengths (prefer 100-year lease terms) and allows for off-Forest Service site replacement and/or additional housing units. The clarifying language, if included in the 2023 Farm Bill revision, will define the intention of the current Farm Bill and limit interpretations that create uncertainty and hesitation in on-going negotiations. Additionally, the following clarifications will aid to keep the current lease discussions moving forward between the Forest Service and Eagle County:

- 1. Extension of time for lease negotiations.** The 2018 Farm Bill will be expiring and we do not want to be hasty due to the expiration. We request that the lease authority be extended for an additional 5 years.
- 2. Lease Length.** Currently there is concern that the Forest Service is limited to only a 30–50-year land lease. The economics of development in mountain towns, particularly with construction inflation and available financing products, make this partnership much less attractive. We ask that the Forest Service have authorization in the Farm Bill to enter into “up to 100-year” leases in exchange for the substantial local investment.
- 3. Allow Forest Service the ability to apply the off site contributions in a mutual lease.** Currently the interpretation of the Farm Bill and supporting rulemaking omits the possibility for a community to receive credit for supporting the local ranger district with land and buildings (housing units) off-site from the Forest Service



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parcel. As an example, the Eagle-Holy Cross Ranger district needs to consolidate several offices, work centers, shop, visitor, and administrative office space in Eagle County. These needs could be better met on land owned by some of our partners. Receiving equal credit for making these improvements for the Forest Service through a mutual lease would assist in utilizing the right location for the right type of compatible activities. We request that local communities have the flexibility to support the Forest Service with non-Forest Service lands and that credit for the U.S. Forest Service use be included in the calculation of local community contributions.

Eagle County's partnership with the USFS to allow housing on the property is essential for wildfire management and overall health of the White River National Forest, by helping them get fully staffed. Potential WRNF employees are unable to accept job offers due to lack of housing. We believe the reauthorized and revised Farm Bill is essential to help encourage greater partnerships between local governments and the USFS on a variety of fronts.

Thank you, Congressman Neguse, for your continued support of Eagle County and the work we do in partnership with the U.S. Forest Service to solve local issues together. We urge you to support clarifying language and the additional authorities outlined for the extension and revision of the Farm Bill.

Sincerely,

Kathy Chandler-Henry

Chair

Matt Scherr

Commissioner

Jeanne McQueeney

Commissioner



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