

Testimony of Rep. Brittany Pettersen (CO-07)
House Natural Resources Committee
Subcommittee on Federal Lands Hearing
September 16, 2026

Chair Tiffany and Ranking Member Neguse:

Thank you for the inclusion of my bill, *H.R. 9999, the Mountain Pine Beetle Coordination Act*, in today's hearing. Thank you also to the Ranking Member for co-leading this legislation with me, and for being a strong advocate for the mitigation of mountain pine beetle damage and the restoration of our forest lands. I am also grateful for Colorado State Forester Matt McCombs for traveling to Washington to testify on behalf of this bill and underscore the urgency of addressing this outbreak's impact on our forest health and wildfire crisis.

The *Mountain Pine Beetle Coordination Act* will direct the United States Forest Service to enter into cooperative agreements with states — like Colorado — specifically to prevent, monitor, and respond to mountain pine beetle outbreaks. This will allow localities additional resources and a stronger framework for responding to emerging outbreaks before they cause widespread and lasting damage.

Colorado has been facing mountain pine beetle outbreaks for decades. Starting in the late 1990s through 2013, beetles affected 3.4 million acres of forests in Colorado and killed 80-90% of trees in lodgepole pine forests on the Western Slope. In the early 2010s, infestations began transitioning into ponderosa pine forests along the Front Range, where we are now seeing a significant and expanding outbreak.¹

Along the I-285 Corridor, which connects mountain towns in my district like Buena Vista, Salida, and Fairplay to the Foothills and the Denver suburbs, you can see many pockets of brown and beetle-killed trees. The same is true along I-70, which runs through both my district and the Ranking Member's. These outbreaks significantly increase the danger of dead trees snapping and dropping heavy branches onto passing cars, blocking evacuation routes, and worsening wildfire risks near high-traffic areas.

Governor Polis established a Mountain Pine Beetle Task Force in December 2025. This Task Force is filled with subject matter experts from across Colorado, and they are working to develop strategies to help protect Colorado communities, critical water resources and forests, support Colorado's outdoor recreation economy, and enhance fire mitigation and response efforts. It is essential that federal response matches the State response to the outbreak, supporting them through continued collaboration on legislation and ensuring federal funds are available. Another one of my bills, *H.R. 10000, the Emergency Mountain Pine Beetle Response Act*, would provide grant funding to address these outbreaks, and I respectfully encourage the Committee to consider that legislation as well.

Addressing our mountain pine beetle crisis is increasingly urgent. Colorado is facing unprecedented levels of drought and increasing temperatures — with this summer being the

¹ <https://csfs.colostate.edu/forest-management/common-forest-insects-diseases/mountain-pine-beetle/>

hottest on record — which weakens trees and accelerates beetle spread. Beetle-killed trees create additional fire hazards that can intensify fire behavior, threaten transportation corridors, and complicate suppression operations. The Front Range of Colorado is heavily populated and recreated, where homes, business, and public spaces sit within the wildland-urban interface, where the overlap between open space and human development pose unique wildfire risks.

At the end of June, the Aspen Acres Fire and Willow Fire broke out in my district, disrupting economies, destroying homes, and upending communities. Those two fires burned over 130,000 acres in our state, and these are two of dozens of fires that have impacted Colorado families this summer alone. I introduced *the Mountain Pine Beetle Coordination Act*, alongside five other bills this summer, to ensure that Congress can be responsive to them as they recover, rebuild, and mitigate against future disasters. The work this Committee does in addressing wildfire concerns is essential and I thank you all for your consideration of my bill today.

I look forward to continuing to work with this Committee to advance this bill and other legislation that can work to address our wildfire crisis.