NEWS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Survey Shows Strong Support for Proactive Forest Management Strategies on Public Lands in the St. Vrain Watershed

Boulder County, CO — A recent survey of residents in the St. Vrain Watershed shows strong public support for a wide range of wildfire risk reduction strategies, particularly those focused on proactive forest management. The *Living with Wildfire in the St. Vrain Watershed in 2024* survey was mailed to 3,680 households across the western portion of the St. Vrain Watershed, with 1,128 responses returned — a 31% response rate. The results provide important insight into how residents of the wildland urban interface want to see public lands managed to protect homes, forests, and water resources from the threat of wildfire.

The Watershed Center, a local nonprofit, coordinates the St. Vrain Forest Health Partnership and worked with The Wildfire Research Center and four local fire protection districts—Allenspark, Lyons, Lefthand, and Pinewood Springs—to conduct the survey. The survey aimed to understand community perspectives on wildfire preparedness, forest treatments, and land management. The responses will help shape local efforts to create fire-adapted communities and more resilient forests.

Survey results about acceptability of fuels treatments on public lands:

- **74% of respondents rated thinning of trees and vegetation on nearby public lands as "extremely" or "very" acceptable.** Only 3% of respondents rated thinning as "not at all acceptable".
- **67% of respondents rated burning piles of cut vegetation (slash piles) on nearby public lands as "extremely" or "very" acceptable.** 5% of respondents rated burning piles as "not at all acceptable".
- **65% of respondents rated creating fuel breaks on public lands by removing trees in strips near communities as "extremely" or "very" acceptable.** 6% of respondents rated fuel breaks as "not at all acceptable".
- **58% of respondents rated prescribed fire ignited by fire professionals on public lands as "extremely" or "very" acceptable.** 6% of respondents rated prescribed fire as "not at all acceptable".

- **46% of respondents rated allowing a naturally ignited fire to burn on public lands, when and where appropriate, as "extremely" or "very" acceptable.** 11% of respondents rated managed wildfire as "not at all acceptable".
- **40% of respondents rated creating patch cuts (removing all trees from a defined area) on public lands as "extremely" or "very" acceptable.** 15% of respondents rated patch cuts as "not at all acceptable".

"These results reflect strong public support from mountain communities when it comes to taking action to reduce wildfire risk and promote forest resilience on public lands," said Chiara Forrester, Forest Program Director at The Watershed Center. "While acceptability varies by treatment type, and more education and communication are needed, these results show that residents understand the importance of proactive management."

The St. Vrain Forest Health Partnership includes federal, state, local, and community partners – including the USDA Forest Service, Colorado State Forest Service, Boulder County, St. Vrain and Left Hand Water Conservancy District, and many others – working together to prepare the landscape and community to receive wildland fire as a natural part of the ecosystem. The Partnership will use the survey findings to guide future forest treatments, emergency preparedness strategies, and community education initiatives. Results from the full survey will be shared in the coming months.

"Allenspark is surrounded by public lands, which means decisions about how those forests are managed directly impact our community," said Chief Mike Cousineau of Allenspark Fire Protection District. "This survey gives residents a voice in shaping how wildfire risk is reduced around us."

High acceptability of treatments like forest thinning on public lands isn't only found in the St. Vrain Watershed – it's also shown in other communities along the Colorado Front Range. The same survey was conducted in Estes Park and in Genesee Fire Protection District within the past four years. In Estes Park, 66% of respondents rated thinning as "extremely" or "very" acceptable, with only 1% of respondents rating it as not acceptable at all. In Genesee, 78% of respondents said thinning is "extremely" or "very" acceptable, with only 2% rating it as not acceptable at all.

"We believe that every community member plays a role in creating wildfire-ready communities and ecosystems," Forrester added. "Hearing directly from residents helps ensure that our efforts reflect the values, experiences, and priorities of the people who live here."

About The Watershed Center
Established in 2005, The Watershed Center is a nonprofit organization based in Longmont, CO that protects and restores watersheds for people and the environment using a collaborative and science-based approach.

About the Wildfire Research Center
The Wildfire Research Center is a nonprofit organization that works with wildfire practitioners across the United States to seek locally tailored pathways to create fire-adapted communities.

About the Lefthand Fire Protection District
The Lefthand Fire Protection District serves an area of 51 square miles, and approximately 1500 residents, across the Lefthand Watershed. With a small paid staff, seasonal mitigation crew, and 45 volunteer firefighters, Lefthand Fire responds to all 911 calls within their district and supports surrounding fire departments in Boulder County through mutual aid agreements. They provide emergency medical services, structure fire, hazardous materials response, rescue, and wildland fire response, suppression and mitigation.

About the Allenspark Fire Protection District
The Allenspark Fire Protection District located in Allenspark, CO is staffed by 28 volunteers. Their response area covers approximately 53 square miles in rural Larimer and Boulder Counties. Special services that they provide in addition to Fire Protection and Emergency Medical Services are Search and Rescue, Camp Inspections, Fire Prevention and Mutual Aid to neighboring agencies. The fire district has mutual aid agreements with neighboring fire departments such as Estes Valley, Lyons, Indian Peaks, Lefthand, Pinewood Springs and the United States Forest Service.

About the Lyons Fire Protection District
Lyons Fire Protection District protects over 6200 people living within 66 square miles. This includes 40 square miles in northern Boulder County and 26 square miles in Larimer County. Centrally located within the district is the town of Lyons, with a population of over 2000 people.

About the Pinewood Springs Fire Protection District
The Pinewood Springs Fire Protection District is a volunteer tax-based entity that provides services to the community of Pinewood Springs and Estes Park Estates, the adjacent National Forest areas, and the US Highway 36 corridor.

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