

## House candidates take alternate approaches to beetle-kill efforts

BY [ROBERT ALLEN](#)  
SUMMIT DAILY NEWS,

As mountain pine beetles continue causing their havoc in Summit County, candidates for state House District 56 are proposing slightly different priorities.

State Rep. Christine Scanlan, D-Summit Cove, advocates securing federal funding for local projects on the forest fringes, while challenger Ali Hasan, a Beaver Creek Republican, wants less regulation of local management of national forests.

Scanlan has sponsored a number of bills aimed at expanding wildfire mitigation and protecting watersheds and utilities.

"I believe we successfully made the bark-beetle devastation a state priority issue this past session, and I am slated to carry another four bills (pending election)," she said in an e-mail.

As vice chairwoman of the Colorado House and Senate wildfire-issues committee, Scanlan traveled this summer to Washington, D.C., to lobby for \$200 million in federal funding to address the dying forests.

Hasan promises to place state funding for pine-beetle mitigation on the ballot. He also seeks to have the federal government relax regulations that he says preclude local governments from managing federal land in its best interest.

"The current pine-beetle epidemic is largely due to the fact that federal government laws will not allow our local authorities to manage national Forest Service areas," he said.

But some local officials question that contention, suggesting that forest supervisors have been willing to work with local entities.

Colorado and Utah, for example, both have "good neighbor" policies with federal authorities, said Gary Severson, the executive director of the Northwest Colorado Council of Governments and a member of the Colorado High Country Forest Health Task Force.

"Local governments can work with the Forest Service now to cross the federal boundary to do work on the federal side," he said.

The "Good Neighbor Authority" program allows the U.S. Forest Service and Department of the Interior to work with state forestry agencies for restoration and protection projects that cross agency boundaries, according to the Western Forestry Leadership Coalition.

Legislation was introduced this year to allow "Good Neighbor Authority" in Western states. The present pilot program in Colorado is set to expire in 2009, according to the coalition.

But Hasan said the "Good Neighbor Authority" isn't enough.



- Summit Daily file photo/Brad Odekirk



"There's still a bureaucratic mess that you have to jump through in order to get anything solved," he said. "I guess you could say it's a step in the right direction, but we need to take it a step further and just remove these laws."

He said he would be willing to support a lawsuit against the federal government to do so, as "they've shown complete incompetence" with forest-management issues.

Severson said the need to work across the boundary isn't especially immediate to local communities.

"There's so much work to be done on the non-federal side of the line," he said. "A good example is the Frisco peninsula, in which all work done there was paid for by citizens in the town of Frisco."

Regarding both candidates' call for increased finances, Severson said it is essential that priorities be set.

"It must be spent for the protection of human life, public infrastructure and critical water supplies," he said. "And we feel very strongly that expenditures of public dollars, if they don't meet these criteria, then (it's) probably not proper use of those dollars."

The infrastructure concerns include power lines and such communications utilities as those serving emergency radios and cellular telephones, which are "all on hilltops and mostly surrounded by dead trees," Severson said.

Scanlan has said that because of the potential for a catastrophic wildfire to take out the country's western power grid, the issue also ought to be addressed as a U.S. Department of Homeland Security concern.

Howard Hallman is president of the Greenlands Reserve Land Trust and is also a member of the Forest Health Task Force. He is volunteering for the local Democratic party this election cycle.

He said financial support from outside Summit County needs to be top priority for local politicians.

"We just don't have the money, and we don't have the resources and the Forest Service budget's been cut the last few years — and yet the need is far greater," Hallman said.

All stakeholders, including Denver Water and Xcel Energy, should be encouraged to cooperate in addition to local, state and federal governments, he said.

"It's in their interest," Hallman said. "We don't want to be like New Orleans and everybody after the fact is pointing the fingers and saying somebody else should have fixed the levees."

Robert Allen can be contacted at (970) 668-4628 or [rallen@summitdaily.com](mailto:rallen@summitdaily.com).

<http://www.summitdaily.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20081022/NEWS/810219955/1078&ParentProfile=1055&title=House%20candidates%20take%20alternate%20approaches%20to%20beetle-kill%20efforts&template=printart>

---

Copyright 2008 All Rights Reserved