August 26, 2019

Mr. Alan Webber, Mayor
City of Santa Fe
200 Lincoln Avenue
Santa Fe, NM 87501
delivery via email: mayor@santafenm.com

Re: Please attend a free public lecture by Dr. Dominick DellaSala, 7pm Thursday, August 29, at the Center for Progress and Justice, 1420 Cerrillos Road.

Dear Mayor Webber:

Dr. Dominick DellaSala is an internationally known author, climate change scientist and forest ecologist from Ashland, Oregon. This Thursday he will be in Santa Fe to discuss the latest scientific approaches in understanding wildfire effects on ecosystems in an over-heating world. He argues that we need to move toward home safety via defensible space and managing wildfires for ecosystem benefits as alternatives to large-scale thinning that will become increasingly less effective at slowing wildfires in a changing climate.

As you know, forest policies have transitioned over the past few decades from suppression of all fires to prescribing low-intensity burns in dry forest types, often in remote areas, where the majority of trees have been cleared. Although most fires are still suppressed, millions of acres in the West are targeted for these treatments in the coming decades.

Such aggressive actions increase fire risk in the short term, harm wildlife habitat and soil productivity and are rarely effective. Each year less than 1% of treated areas encounter the fire they are supposed to limit. In other words, fuels treatments miss 99% of wildfires each year. By comparison, home safety

measures like defensible space and building with fire-resistant materials are at least 95% effective at protecting structures.

A shift is underway spurred by an understanding that today's large fires are essential to maintaining diverse and resilient landscapes—even when most trees are killed.

Dr. DellaSala, along with 27 other leading scientists from around the world, co-authored *The Ecological Importance of Mixed-Severity Fires: Nature's Phoenix* that documents how new life arises from the ashes of high-severity fire. Aspen, oaks and many other trees and shrubs quickly re-sprout from roots in even the most severely burned areas. Wildflowers and grasses cover the soil, morel mushrooms abound and pollinating insects fill the air. Pocket gophers and salamanders emerge from their burrows. Deer and elk feast on fresh green shoots. Woodpeckers arrive to nest in charred trees and feed on wood-boring beetles that have flown for many miles, homing in on the fire's heat or smoke.

Politically driven high-impact programs to reduce fuels in western forests will fail because the over-heating climate is becoming the dominant driver of fire behavior. Protected areas like wilderness, national parks and many roadless areas should be expanded because research has documented that they burn less severely than highly flammable logged-over and heavily grazed forests. In addition to taking fire-safe measures to protect homes and preventing human ignitions near communities, restoration should focus on these degraded landscapes.

Co-existing with wildfire in both its benign and more terrifying forms will require overcoming fear. Wolves were once feared but are now tolerated and even appreciated by many for their wild beauty. Dr. DellaSala argues the same paradigm shift is possible through understanding and acceptance of wildfire as a life-giving force while first and foremost protecting lives and homes.

Hope to see you Thursday.

Sincerely,

/Sam Hitt/

Sam Hitt, President
Santa Fe Forest Coalition