

HB 5019  
Submitted by Marla Rae  
Gateway Rangeland Fire Protection Association  
February 27, 2019

- I regret not being at the hearing to testify in person. Yet I won't complain about the snow; we need it.
- Let me first thank the Legislative Assembly for its support over the years of rangeland fire protection associations (RFPAs). This support has been **critical to our efforts to fight rangeland fires and protect critical sage grouse habitat.**
- The "ask" for the RFPAs is **\$450,000**. In the overall scheme, that might strike some as a relatively small amount. To the RFPAs, it is a big dang deal.
- Gateway is one of **23 rangeland fire protection associations** (RFPAs). The first was organized in 1964; the most recent (Shaniko/Bakeoven) is in the organizational process right now.
- In all, RFPAs throughout the state respond to rangeland fires on close to **16 million acres** in Oregon. Most of that land is **home to sage grouse**, primarily in eight counties in eastern Oregon.
- RFPAs responders are **exclusively volunteers**, primarily farmers, ranchers and other landowners. The number of volunteers – slightly over 1,000 – has **doubled** in the last four years.
- Significantly, the number of **trained firefighters** has more than doubled as well to over 700 by the end of 2018, and more volunteers are taking more advanced fire classes.
- In 2018, we saw an all-time low of 25,000 acres burned in sage grouse territory. In fact, Oregon is the **only state in the west** to see a decrease in the loss of sage grouse habitat due to wildfire and invasive species.
- The \$450,000 appropriation to the Department of Forestry will enable RFPAs to enhance critical radio communications, replace obsolete hand-me-down equipment and outfit additional volunteers with personal protective equipment.
- We are incredibly grateful for the support from the legislature and from the Department of Forestry. We commit to increase our partnerships and strengthen our long-established relationships with local, state and federal partners.
- After all, we are neighbors helping neighbors.