

Testimony: HB 2659

House Committee on Natural Resources

Chairman: Brad Witt

My name is Steve Cafferata and I live in Lane County. I am a certified forester and member of the Emergency Fire Cost Committee where I represent small woodland owners and rural residents. My wife, family, and I manage four tree farms certified under the American Tree Farm System.

I have practiced forestry for more than 50 years, and I have seen years of my hard work burn up in a few hours.

Forest roads are a critical part of forest management, and particularly for fire protection. They also provide access to the public for recreation and hunting.

Initial attack is the key to extinguishing fires when they are small, have done minimal damage, and are at minimum cost. Well-maintained roads are critical to this effort.

Over the last ten years, 86% of the acres burned in Oregon were on federal forest lands that in many cases lack good road access for fast and safe initial attack. This has resulted in additional costs both to the Oregon Forest Land Protection Fund and the Oregon General Fund, as well as federal tax-payers. Many private landowners have suffered devastating losses from these federal forests that have crossed over on to private lands.

Taxing private forest roads encourages poor access and more expensive and damaging fires. Roads are expensive to build and maintain. No landowner wants unnecessary or excessive roads.

On our family forest, we carefully maintain our roads and insure they are ready for fire access. On all of our four tree farms, access to our federal neighbors' property in case of fire is over our road systems, which are available for this purpose without cost or easement.

We do not believe it is in the interest of Oregon to discourage private roads by taxing them.

Stephen L. Cafferata

March 25, 2019