

February 4, 2020

Senate Committee on Wildfire Reduction and Recovery

Re: **Comments about SB 1514, SB 1516 & SB 1536**

Dear Committee:

We request that this letter be entered into the public record on this matter. We wish to comment on our understanding of Senate Bills 1514, 1516 and 1536. First and foremost, any changes to the current wildfire fighting system should retain the core structure of the 2013 Wildfire Protection Act.

First, a little background about us. My wife and I are retired, and we own and manage about 84 acres of forestland in western Oregon near Estacada, which we have been doing for almost 30 years. We are proud of our forest stewardship, and have conducted tours of our forest for the Clackamas County Farm Forestry Association and the Clackamas River Basin Council, among other organizations. We actively manage our forest for many requirements and uses, ranging from periodic timber harvesting to wildlife habitat, recreation and riparian (relating to or situated on or near the banks of a river) needs. For many years we have also endeavored to follow best management practices to minimize the risk due to forest fire hazards by pruning lower limbs of our trees (to minimize ladder fuels), minimizing tree density (by maintaining more optimal spacing between trees to favor growth and reduce stress) and to minimize potential fuels on the ground (by removing excessive slash).

As a result of climate change, we recognize that the status quo of how to prevent and fight forest fires is under review and more aggressive measures will need to be taken. We also recognize that these additional measures may cost us more.

If additional funding is needed to support new, more aggressive wildfire-related programs, it would be appropriate for forest owners to participate using the current funding model. The existing funding model, which is comprised of a balance of property taxes and harvest taxes combined with balanced general fund contributions has worked in the past and will continue to work in the future. Do not depart from this funding model. In our case we do not mind paying a little more provided the distribution remains balanced, and all who currently pay into the fund also pay proportionately more. For example, for this 2020 property tax year, we pay \$108.58 in a fire patrol tax and \$47.50 in a fire patrol surcharge; both of these taxes are a component of the Oregon Forestland Protection Fund. When we harvest trees, we also pay an additional 62.5 cents per thousand board feet into this fund. To protect our residence, we pay \$831.04 to the Estacada Rural Fire District. As you can see, we already pay quite a bit in wildfire-related prevention taxes.

Forests, whether on public or private land, benefit all Oregonians in many ways, not only in the value of wood taken off the land for wood products, which is why monies from the general fund should also be included in any funding model and at a similar percentage as they currently are. The current percentage of the general fund that pays into this funding model is fair.

We support the concept of SB 1514, however funding for the demonstration activities called for in this bill should come from the general fund.

We also support SB 1516 in order to assist the Oregon Department of Forestry (ODF) to better prepare for wildfires. Any funding modifications to support proposed changes should follow the existing funding model balancing landowner and general fund contributions.

SB 1536 suggests the state set ODF Fire District budgets. There is no reason to change the existing structure. The base level of fire protection is set at the local district level with landowner involvement. Changes to the local base budgets need to come from the local landowners. It is their property that is at risk and being protected. As noted in SB 1536, the proper level of protection for local districts should not be dictated from Salem. If local landowners' needs are not being met by their local districts, they can bring that message to the Board of Forestry. Do not change this successful system.

In summary, **we support some of the concepts put forth in these senate bills to enhance Oregon's readiness to prevent and control wildfires. However, any increases in funding to pay for new or larger programs must be done in a fair and equitable manner, preserving the funding model percentages currently in use.**

Thank you.

Sincerely,



David Bugni



Mary Bugni

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