



Oregon Small Woodlands Association
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From: Mike Barsotti, President of Oregon Small Woodlands Association
To: Senate Committee On Wildfire Reduction and Recover
RE: SBs 1514, 1516, and 1536

My name is Mike Barsotti, I'm a family forestland owner in Linn County, President of the Oregon Small Woodlands Association, and was a member of the Suppression Committee to the Governor's Council on Wildfire Response.

I very much appreciate the establishment of this senate committee to deal with the increased severity of wildfire in Oregon. I will address my comments to SBs 1514, 1516, and 1536 by focusing on three areas: strategy for managing wildfire, prevention and suppression, and funding.

Strategy for managing wildfire: The Oregon Department of Forestry's current strategy is to aggressively attack wildfire during times when the risk of catastrophic wildfires is high. I see that some call this a failed approach as fire has played a large role in the development of our forests. While fire has played a large role in the development of our forests, returning to a time when wildfires were not controlled is folly. You cannot manage fire during high fire danger periods. Public safety and health, water quality and other watershed resources, and timber supply are all factors that are negatively impacted by wildfire and impossible to ignore when considering the best strategy for battling wildfire. These factors were not present when fire helped shape our forests. The current aggressive strategy to keep fire small protects people, our environment and is cost effective. Spending more on mitigation in areas where fire plays an active role in forest development needs to be added to our state's existing strategy.

Managing wildfire: The Governor's Council on Wildfire Response Suppression Committee looked into how Oregon currently battles wildfire. USDA Under Secretary for Natural Resources and Environment Jim Hubbard who supervised the Forest Service stated that Oregon's Department of Forestry's (ODF) fire program is the best in the United States. We agreed with Under Secretary Hubbard but did find areas needing attention. ODF uses a militia system where all employees have fire suppression in their job description. I worked for ODF for 32 years, not in the fire program but spent 24 years on an Incident Management Team (IMT). Currently, ODF cannot fill its three IMTs because ODF staffing has decreased over time. Oregon's militia approach also includes forest landowners who train with ODF and provide resources to effectively battle wildfire.

Since wildfire is not a 12-month issue, simply increasing the number of permanent full time positions in ODF's fire program is not consistent with the militia approach and not as cost effective as restoring positions across ODF's programs where these individuals can be trained to be part of fire program when needed and serve in other capacities when not needed.

While ODF has continued to modernize its fire program over time, the Suppression Committee did find the aviation assets need special attention as addressed in SB 1516.

Funding: OSWA supports the existing 2013 Wildfire Protection Act and its approach where the public and landowners share in costs of controlling wildfires. OSWA's position is fairness in funding.

I live on our forest property. This year I paid \$533 to the Lyons Rural Fire District, ODF District fire assessment and the ODF Forestry Fire Surcharge since I live on our forested property. I understand and support this.

More funding is needed to deal with the increased numbers and acres burned we have experienced as supported in SB 1516. There is a lot of data on how fires start and forest landowners' percentage of fire start is around 4 %.

How best to move forward with fairness to the public and forest landowners is a complex issue that needed more time to study than the Governor's Council on Wildfire Response had. The Suppression Committee recommended and OSWA supports SB 1515 creation of a third party to evaluate Oregon's current funding strategy, comparing it to how other western states fund fire prevention and suppression, and report back to the Legislature. We believe that this third party review needs to include representatives from those currently part of Oregon's funding of wildfire prevention and suppression.

One final thought. The Legislature created a fire mitigation program in Oregon State University's Forestry and Natural Resource Extension program. OSWA sees this program having great value to family forest landowners. We hope that this committee will provide guidance on how OSU's, ODF's and the Fire Marshall's efforts provide an effective coordinated effort in reducing the threat and impacts of wildfire on Oregon's citizens and natural resources.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony.