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Senate Committee on Wildfire Reduction and Recovery
Oregon Farm Bureau Testimony on SB 1516
February 5, 2020

Chair Golden, and members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on SB 1516. By way of background, the Oregon Farm Bureau (OFB) is the state's largest agricultural trade association, representing nearly 7,000 farm and ranch families across the state, many of whom are active contributors to rural fire protection districts and rangeland fire protection associations. As longtime stewards of the land, Oregon's farmers and ranchers fully recognize the importance of active land management, and a highly functioning Department of Forestry in order to prevent wildfire from spreading on public and private lands.

With that said, OFB has concerns about whether the program created by HB 1516 is the most effective means of addressing wildfire concerns for this upcoming fire season. While we fully support upgrading firefighting equipment in areas where it is actually needed and having enough "boots on the ground" to fight wildfires, OFB does not believe that this bill directs funding to where it is actually needed.

More importantly, we have concerns about potential funding mechanisms for this work. Oregon Farm Bureau represents many small woodland owners around the state who are already facing reduced prices and increased costs, and who are worried about the long-term viability of their operations. To that end, we would oppose increasing landowner assessments on improved forestland as a funding mechanism for this work. We would instead recommend relying on general fund dollars to fund this request. Oregon small woodland owners cannot afford another tax increase.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony.

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