

## Senate Committee on Wildfire Reduction and Recovery

Dear Senator Jeff Golden and Senate Committee Members,

As you consider funding options to address wildfire costs, please keep in mind that family owners who live on their forestlands, or who have improvements on their lands, provide the majority of the funding to the OFLPF.

"The Oregon Forest Land Protection Fund (OFLPF) was established by the Oregon Legislature as an insurance fund with the purpose of equalizing emergency fire suppression costs among the various Oregon Department of Forestry protection districts. The emergency funding system is designed to operate as an 'insurance policy' whereby all districts contribute (pay premiums) into the fund so that money will be available to any individual district to pay fire suppression costs on 'emergency fires.' " -ODF Website

When the fund was created in 1991, no one expected that the \$47.50 paid each year by family woodland owners would generate such a dramatic amount (now at least 68%) into the OFLPF. I think over the past 30 years you will find that the majority of these funds have been spent on fires on private and BLM lands in Southern and Eastern Oregon.

Reading the bill, it is not apparent to me whether an increase in the \$47.50 paid by family woodland owners into OFLPF can be used to hire personnel, equipment and supplies.

However, if increasing the \$47.50 per improved lot fee is considered, I encourage the Committee to investigate where OFLPF dollars are raised (by county) and, more importantly, whether fires that were eligible for OFLPF reimbursement had improvements or homes threatened.

The question is pretty simple. "Over the past 10 years, for fires eligible for OFLPF emergency dollars, were 68% of those dollars spent suppressing fires that threatened structures on improved lots owned by family woodland owners?"

My guess is the Committee would only hear anecdotal evidence, something like "...homes in the forest and rural interface increase suppression costs." There appears to be no hard data that directly documents increased costs. The question of who pays the suppression bill for fires threatening houses is further clouded by the positive, significant actions of rural fire departments.

The 1991 legislation also created a minimum lot assessment of \$18.75, with \$3.75 going into the OFLPF and \$15.00 going to each protection district's annual budget. It would seem the legislature's intent was that these funds would focus on fire prevention and suppression for homes on small lots in the rural interface. Hopefully the Committee can determine whether, over the last 30 years, these additional (and substantial) funds have, in fact, increased the prevention and suppression forces for family woodland owners and homeowners in each fire protection district.

**In closing**, if family woodland owner taxes are increased, I would hope those dollars are directed to hiring new prevention and suppression people at each ODF protection district, with their mission focused on protecting family woodland owner properties. **I encourage Committee members to carefully consider the fairness of any increases in fire funding placed on family woodland owners.**

For the Committee's information, my wife and I live on 40 forested acres in Washington County. In tax year 2019 we paid:

**\$44.96 ODF Fire Patrol (NWO Protection Association)**  
**\$47.50 OFLPF for one improved lot**  
**\$464.35 Forest Grove Rural Fire Protection**

Sincerely,

Scott Hayes  
14710 NW Orchardale Road  
Forest Grove, Oregon 97116