



March 15, 2020

Re: Testimony in support of Comprehensive Wildfire Policy Action in SB 248 -1 & SB 287

Chair Golden and Members of the Committee on Natural Resources and Wildfire Recovery:

The undersigned organizations write to express our joint support of the comprehensive and proactive efforts in SB 248 -1 and SB 287 to increase community preparedness and reduce future wildfire risk while building resiliency to withstand the increasing severity and frequency of wildfires in Oregon.

The extreme 2020 wildfire season underscores the need for significant policy reform and increased investments in wildfire preparedness and response to protect lives, property, and public health and safety. The 2020 fire season was felt by all of us, no matter our community, but was especially difficult on people who were already struggling. Oregonians across the state are extremely concerned with wildfires and their impacts – risk to life and homes; harm to the health of our forests, watersheds and wildlife habitats; and negative economic implications for businesses.

State and local governments have moved quickly to respond, but the work is far from over. Continued attention and long-term investment are required as communities and forests rebuild and heal. However, we cannot afford to focus on the past alone. To shift current trends, a forward-looking, comprehensive approach is required to achieve community preparedness and wildfire risk reduction, and we must act before the next wildfire season hits.

An essential first step is developing a state wildfire risk and hazard map built upon a consistent definition of the Wildland Urban Interface, incorporating fire hazard data, and implementing best practices in its design. This map would directly inform the rebuilding of our communities after last year's fires and provide needed data to inform deliberations on many other policies contained in these bills.

With enhancements to health systems for smoke, emergency response and disaster recovery, this legislation ensures that our communities can adapt and heal after inevitable wildfire events. And by ensuring a focus on utility mitigation and transmission system stability, defensible space around homes and structures, dry forest restoration, and land use planning, management, and building, this legislation provides direction on the most pressing areas for action to build future resiliency. Together they provide strong guidance for strategic investments in community preparedness, wildfire risk reduction, and forest resilience.

In the wake of last year's tragic fire season, it is time to plan ahead, prepare, and invest in the work that we know will make our communities and landscapes more resilient. With devastating wildfires ahead, we commend this committee for its focus on this urgent issue and commit to working with you to further refine and enact solutions.

Thank you for your consideration and leadership.

Sincerely,

Amelia Porterfield, Senior Policy Advisor, The Nature Conservancy
Dylan Kruse, Director of Government Affairs, Sustainable Northwest
Mary Kyle McCurdy, Deputy Director, 1000 Friends of Oregon