



March 16, 2021

Submitted via online submission form

Senate Committee on Natural Resources and Wildfire Recovery
Oregon State Legislature
900 Court Street, NE
Salem, Oregon 97301

RE: Testimony on SB 287 and SB 248 Addressing Wildfire Risk in Oregon

Dear Chair Golden and Honorable Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony on SB 287 and SB 248. Oregon Natural Desert Association (“ONDA”) is a public interest conservation organization that exists to protect, defend and restore Oregon’s high desert. ONDA has a long history of supporting comprehensive science-based wildfire management policy and is involved in multiple planning processes, collaborative discussions and related efforts to address fire in sagebrush steppe landscapes in Oregon.

Sagebrush grasslands and mixed juniper woodlands in eastern Oregon face increasingly destructive wildfire that threaten sensitive species and habitats, private property, local communities and regional economies. Even as federal and state agencies, scientists and stakeholders continue to hash out landscape-scale strategies to address desert wildfire, state policymakers can support these efforts in two key ways: 1) increase the probability of early fire detection and 2) reduce wildfire suppression response times.

Early detection and rapid response can aid in reducing the size and intensity of range wildfires, lessening direct impacts to wildlife habitat and other resource values, while also combating the expansion of annual grasses that invade burned areas. Early detection and rapid response can also decrease the need for more aggressive and expensive fire-fighting efforts, and damaging and questionably effective fire prevention techniques such as fuel breaks, planting “green strips” of non-native species and other manipulations of native vegetation and wildlife habitat.

Remote Fire Cameras and Rural Fire Protection Associations are innovative, increasingly popular, and notably effective management strategies deployed in eastern Oregon to increase the probability of early wildfire detection and decrease wildfire suppression response times. Further investment in these key strategies is critical to future wildfire management in Oregon’s high desert.

ONDA applauds your efforts to plan ahead and develop statewide policy and guidance for managing wildfire. Ecosystem-based strategies that emphasize early detection and rapid response, while also addressing the causes of ecosystem degradation and the resistance and resilience of native plant communities, are essential to a long-term, forward looking wildfire strategy in Oregon.

Sincerely,

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