

Chairman Golden, Committee members.

My name is Ron Carmickle, Mayor of Gates, Oregon.

In regards to SB 248 and 287 there are three issues that I feel are important to protecting Oregonian's homes and communities.

1. Early detection and suppression of forest fires - History shows that early detection and early suppression of forest fires aids in protecting our natural resources and our communities.
2. Power line shut offs during red-flag periods - There is substantial proof that power lines have substantially contributed to unnecessary and destructive fire ignitions.
3. Homeowner fire protection education – Science has shown that home outward safety measures give the home a 90-95% better chance of survival.

Over the last several years, we have seen an increasing amount of fires destroying our cities. In Gates, we lost 91 homes, 2 of them being my own. Some want to call it due to climate change, some want to call it poor forest management. But the facts show that there are no more fires today than 30 years ago. What the facts show is a substantial increase in acres destroyed per fire, in the last 30 years. According to a The Congressional Research Service report published January 4th, 2021: In: 1991- 3 million acres were burned by 78k fires = 38.5 acres per fire. In 2020- 10 million acres were burned by only 60k fires = 166.6 acres per fire. This is a 77% increase in acreage destroyed per fire.

I personally blame this on a 'Let it Burn' policy, implemented during the 1970's and still continues today. This 'Let it Burn' policy, is clearly not working.

Taken from the pages of the Forest History Society

*Legendary forest fires in the late 1800s like the **Peshtigo Fire of 1871** bolstered the argument that forest fires threatened future commercial timber supplies. Concern for protecting those supplies and also watersheds helped conservationists convince the U.S. government in 1891 to begin setting aside national forest reservations. In 1905 the U.S. Forest Service was established. It was given managerial control of these lands, which we now call the National Forests. Forest management necessitated fire protection. After all, foresters argued, why create National Forests if they were going to burn down.*

One early conservationist, Bernard Fernow, served as Executive Secretary of the American Forestry Association (AFA) and as chief of the Division of Forestry from 1886 to 1898. Fernow succeeded in laying the foundation for federal forest management. During his twelve years as

chief, one historian has noted, "he firmly implanted in American forestry the idea that a supply of wood was fundamental to civilization."

In 1910 a series of forest fires known as the "**Big Blowup**," burned 3 million acres, in only two days, in Montana, Idaho, and Washington. The 1910 fires had a profound effect on national fire policy. Three of the men who had fought the 1910 fires—William Greeley, Robert Stuart, and Ferdinand Silcox—served from 1920 to 1938 as Forest Service chiefs. This put them in a position to institute a policy of total fire suppression. This policy had two goals: preventing fires, and suppressing a fire as quickly as possible once one started.

The Forest Service developed a systematic approach to fire protection. This would involve building networks of roads, communications systems, lookout towers, and ranger stations. To protect both federal and non-federal lands, the agency won passage of the **Weeks Act of 1911**, which in part established a framework between the federal government and the states for cooperative firefighting.

Following several severe fire seasons in the early 1930s, fire suppression took on even greater urgency. In 1933, the federal government created the Civilian Conservation Corps, which put thousands of men to work building fire breaks and fighting fires. In 1935, the Forest Service established the so-called 10 a.m. policy, which decreed that every fire should be suppressed by 10 a.m. the day following its initial report.

Fire suppression efforts were aided by the development of new technologies, such as airplanes, **smokejumpers**, and fire suppression chemicals. With such tools, fires could be fought anywhere—and were.

Until around 1970, federal land managers remained obsessed with controlling large fires. But during the 1960s, scientific research increasingly demonstrated the positive role fire played in forest ecology. This led to, in the early 1970s to a radical change in Forest Service policy—to let fires burn when and where appropriate. It began with allowing natural-caused fires to burn in designated wilderness areas. From this the "let-burn" policy evolved.

The Forest Service now faces fires that have grown in size and ferocity.

The picture is quite clear to anyone who actually takes the time to research out the data and history of our forest, that fire suppression is essential to controlling lost timber. It is also quite clear that back burning and controlled burns have proven to be healthy to forest ecology. Then we have to take into account exurban sprawl in what is called the wildland-urban interface.

Senate Bills 248 and 287 are once again bringing back the urgency government felt in the early 1930's. History is once again repeating itself. This time let's get it right.

Things that will matter are:

- 1. Creating Fire-Adapted Communities** – By working from the home outward, we can increase the resiliency of our infrastructure, the effectiveness of our emergency response, and the safety of our communities. Educating homeowners on defensible space around their homes, and home-hardening, and providing them with the means to achieve those defenses will aid in fewer homes lost to wildfires. A fire hardened home is proven to have a 90-95% better chance of surviving an extreme fire.
- 2. Preparing for & Responding to Future fires** – Fire managers need to respond to wildfires that pose direct risks to homes and communities. Early detection and a quick response are methods that have proven to be effective. We can learn from our predecessors. We need to train a new generation of fire professionals who can protect communities and do so cost-effectively. We also need to supply them with the tools to do their job. Requiring a comprehensive system of protocols for utilities to use in order to de-energize the grid in locations where a high risk of downed power-lines exists, is in everyone's best interest. Downed power-lines have proven to be a major contributor to out of control fires.
- 3. Technology** – We live in a world of ever increasing technological abilities. Using technology we can discover and suppress wildfires timely and effectively. Funding equipment and personnel to achieve these goals will be fundamental. Drones and cameras can replace lookout towers. Bigger and better planes can reduce man-power and aid in quicker responses. Quicker responses will save timber, loss of real estate, and protect our cities, our health, and possibly our lives.
- 4. Wildfire Workforce Corps** - As a young person, I had the privilege of attending a class field trip where we went out into the forest and planted young trees. It is still one of my fondest memories, and has given me a massive respect for our forest lands and nature in general. I would like to see Oregon invest in young people, and to use our dollars on training programs like the Wildfire Workforce Corps.

Although Senate Bills 248 and 287 has a lot of good ideas, they still fail to put into place any policies that promote early detection and suppression of fires. It puts the most responsibility on the public and not the Forest Service or Government. I fear, it allows insurers to take advantage of those who live in rural areas, and possibly charge absorbent premiums, as has happened with the Health Care Act.

The most fundamental part of controlling the wildfires, as our past has shown, is with early fire suppression. As climate changes and the summers become hotter and the forests become drier, it is obvious that fires are fueled easier and can become more severe. During these periods, early suppression is the only answer to keeping fires from burning out of control. Any legislation at this time should have provisions for early fire suppression.

Senate Bills 248 and 287 are not perfect and definitely have areas that need much reconsideration. But they definitely have elements that are essential to a safer future. I ask that this committee realize our country has addressed this situation before and implemented a plan that worked good for at least 40 years. Please consider the elements of our past to help protect our future.

Thank You

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