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House Committee on Agriculture and Natural Resources

Testimony in support of HB 2572: Prescribed Fire

Submitted by: Pete Caligiuri, Forest Program Director

Chair Witt, and Members of the Committee:

For the record, my name is Pete Caligiuri and I'm here representing The Nature Conservancy in Oregon. I lead a team of scientists and conservation practitioners based in Ashland, Klamath Falls, Bend, and Baker City working to improve dry forest restoration efforts to increase forest resilience, reduce wildfire risk to communities, and sustain the many benefits these forests provide to nature and people now and into the future. I am also a member of TNC's qualified prescribed fire team and co-lead the Central Oregon Prescribed Fire Training Exchange, which brings together local, national, and international participants for 2 weeks each year for live fire training and capacity building.

I thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on House Bill 2572 today. The Nature Conservancy's work is focused on the ecology and restoration of Oregon's dry forests, including as landowners, forest stewards, and fire managers. We lead training and workforce capacity development, as well as planning and implementing large-scale, prescribed fire projects in partnership with local, state, federal, and tribal partners on thousands of acres each year. And it is through this lens that we provide our strong support for HB2572 and its component parts aimed at addressing some of the key barriers to increasing the use of prescribed fire to restore fire-dependent forest ecosystems and reduce future wildfire severity.

The barriers to increasing prescribed fire use are many, but chief among them are capacity limitations, namely we just don't have enough people to get the work done, and increasing the efficiency and cost-effectiveness of the work so we can get more done and at larger scales.

By formally launching the state certified burn manager program, HB 2572 would begin advancing real solutions to increase capacity by building a larger pool of trained fire practitioners needed to take this work to scale. In other states that have enacted such programs, this provides a path for experienced fire practitioners to become certified burn managers, and provides training for landowners hoping to lead burns on their lands, both of which would serve to augment the existing prescribed fire capacity around the state.

Secondly, the bill would facilitate more efficient and cost-effective prescribed fire implementation across ownership boundaries between agreeing landowners. We repeatedly see that the most prudent way to implement a prescribed burn is for multiple landowners to work together under a common burn plan based on control lines that follow roads or natural fire breaks rather than fences. Ultimately, this makes prescribed fire operations safer for practitioners, more cost-effective, and less impactful on the forest. However, existing state law requires a cumbersome process and experience that many private landowners do not have, both of which create unintended barriers for landowners interested but

inexperienced with prescribed fire planning and implementation and makes our job harder when trying to support and plan cross-boundary burning with willing landowners. HB 2572 would allow a collaborative burn approach where each landowner brings their relative strengths to the table, such as burn plan development, fire line personnel, or equipment, to fulfill the needs of the larger burn team.

Again, HB2572 makes sense to us, as scientists and fire managers. It addresses key barriers – capacity, efficiency, and cost-effectiveness – and is an important step towards a better future for or fire-dependent forests and forest-dependent communities.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today.