



# Associated Oregon Loggers, Inc.

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March 19, 2021

The Honorable Paul Evans, Chair  
House Committee on Veterans and Emergency Management  
Oregon State Capitol  
Salem, OR 97301

Subject: HB 3160

Chair Evans, Vice Chairs Lewis and Meek, and Committee Members:

## Introduction

For the record, my name is Amanda Astor. I come to you on behalf of the Associated Oregon Loggers (AOL) as their forest policy manager. AOL is the statewide trade association who has been the voice of small family forest businesses for over 50 years.

Thank you for the opportunity to share with you the voice of nearly 1,000 small family forest businesses who helped significantly during the Labor Day Fires and are out regreening Oregon's forests as we speak. AOL's members work daily to steward Oregon's forests. These honorable small businesses led by forestry professionals employ more than 22,000 Oregonians who provide sustainable forest management services for Oregon's public and private forestlands, while producing economic stability for their communities and living wage jobs for their employees and families.

Wildfires are a problem for all Oregonians, whether they are living in the WUI, choking on hazardous smoke, being affected financially from smoke impacts to their business or other such issues, every Oregonian is affected. That is why it is critical to find ways to move the needle and have stable funding for the wildfire problem in Oregon. HB 3160 attempts to broach this sensitive and complex problem. We thank Rep. Marsh and Sen. Frederick for their work on this specific topic and for offering up a possible solution.

AOL believes there is much to discuss on this topic and do have some concerns moving forward with deliberations on HB 3160 in this Committee. We want to be a part of the solution and look forward to working through these key discussions.

## Existing Contributions from the Forest Contracting Sector

A major component of Oregon's forest fire protection militia are small family forest businesses who work in the wood's day in and day out. Family forest management businesses work tirelessly every day to steward the lands, build the ingress and egress roads, develop defensible space, and much more. These small businesses are also trained, equipped and regularly deployed as effective voluntary "first responders" on forest wildfires.

Small family forest businesses are a critical part of Oregon's forest fire protection—through both contracted services and uncompensated "in-kind" firefighting. Such "in-kind" voluntary emergency response efforts of family forest businesses are mobilized frequently under-appreciated by far-away and unaware Oregonians. Any depletion of small family forest businesses would lead to weaker initial attack on wildfires resulting in more toxic smoke breathed in by all Oregonians and more habitat loss for threatened and endangered species across Oregon.

Many in our forestry family say 2020 has induced generational changes to the forest sector. Capping a year that will have lingering fiscal shock on Oregon's small family forest business—the Legislature now has a bill in front of them that could induce more economic harm to these small businesses.

Let us be clear, we do believe that funding solutions should be explored and that sharing the cost by all Oregonians could be a successful path forward, but continuing to tack on costs to those already helping and key to the success of the whole system may cause unintended consequences.

### **Effect on Small Businesses Operating in the Woods**

Additional fiscal burdens on small business could lead to more small business closures and disinvestment that would trigger further consolidation into fewer larger businesses. Oregon's future is more vibrant with a stronger small family forest business community and this bill could unjustly affect those who already pay taxes that lead to fire prevention and suppression funding and who already apply in-kind contributions as mentioned above.

Many of AOL's members have dozens of policies that would each be affected by this bill. It is not clear if the \$10 surcharge would be on each of these policies or on only certain policies. Forest contractors are small businesses that are price-takers, which lack the scale economies and capitalization necessary to endure economic shocks, the proposed bills could enact a disproportionately greater negative burden on family forest businesses who already pay into the system for fire prevention and suppression.


### **Conclusion**

If a major component of HB 3160 is to find a shared funding mechanism for the wildfire problem, then perhaps it should recognize those already making efforts within it either through other taxes, in-kind contributions and/or their daily stewarding of the forest and the WUI.

Please let us be a part of the solution. We have valuable perspective in this conversation and want to move the needle forward in a significant but equitable way.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on our overall support of future discussion on funding for wildfire prevention and suppression, but also our concerns with HB 3160 as currently presented.

Graciously,



Amanda Astor (she/her/hers)

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