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Supporting Effective and Regionally Tailored Solutions for Wildfire Mitigation, Suppression, and Preparedness

Oregonians have faced significant turmoil this year, especially as a result of the catastrophic wildfires that ravaged many parts of our state. In an effort to address these significant impacts, our organizations have come together to form a coalition of key stakeholders representing homeowners, builders, businesses, working families, natural resources, and local governments across urban and rural Oregon. Through their careers, volunteer efforts, or responsibilities as rural landowners, our members frequently interact with fire on the landscape and recognize the need for thoughtful, effective, and regionally tailored solutions to wildfire mitigation, suppression, and preparedness.

With these key principles in mind, our coalition urges the Legislature to prioritize the following areas, as we work together to address the many wildfire related bills this session:

Strengthen Mitigation & Resiliency Efforts: While wildfire is natural on the landscape, there are effective measures the state could take to reduce wildfire danger. The State Forestry Department, in concert with Oregon State University, should establish treatment projects designed to reduce wildfire fuels on public or private forestlands and rangelands. Additionally, the state should support and incentivize fuel reduction methods outside of just prescribed burning, such as mechanical thinning or grazing by livestock.

Gather Experts to Assess Current Systems: The legislature should establish the Land Use and Wildfire Policy Committee. The committee will be made up of a group of expert stakeholders who will address mapping, land use, and defensible space concerns, while evaluating regional differences and existing protections. The state should not move forward on the creation of a statewide risk map before the Land Use and Wildfire Policy Committee finishes its work.

Enhance Rural Fire Protection: Oregon's rural communities and landowners require an update to statutory language to have the opportunity to partner with Rangeland Protection Associations (RPA's). We must allow croplands to join protection associations if that is the best option for protecting their communities from wildfire. Partnering with agencies through an RPA would ensure tools are available to conduct effective fire suppression as safely and efficiently as possible.

Structural Codes: Instead of overhauling our current system, DCBS should establish an on-line, research-based interactive mapping tool to mitigate the effects of wildfire for the construction of residential structures. The tool should help builders and communities identify the necessary requirements to “harden” homes based on the level of risk up front in the development process.

Fire Fighting Investments: Recent fire seasons have shown an increased threat to communities and infrastructure throughout Oregon. The changing fire landscape has proven that these threats are an "all Oregon" problem and deserve an "all Oregon" funding solution. We support increased General Fund investment in ODF's firefighting resources, but need a deeper discussion about any proposals that would shift additional costs onto existing rate payers.

Fight Fire, Not the Feds: One of the biggest frustrations for rural landowners is the jurisdictional boundaries that impose barriers for wildfire suppression. Oregon should be able to mobilize suppression equipment and personnel to control fires that are burning within the borders of this state, even if the fire is located on federal lands.

Prepare Oregonians for Future Fire Seasons: The State should administer a community risk reduction program with an emphasis on education to prepare all of our communities for future wildfire seasons and emergency situations.

Please do not hesitate to reach out to us with any questions or concerns about these suppression and mitigation concepts.

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