

To: Senator Golden and Members of the Natural Resources and Wildfire Recovery Committee
From: Rand Schenck
Date: April 8, 2021
Re: SB 762 – Wildfire Response and Recovery

Last September I was personally impacted by the Labor Day fires as I have a recreation cabin that sits in the Gifford Pinchot National Forest. The Big Hollow fire which burned about 25,000 acres came to within a mile of my cabin and for over a month we were under a mandatory evacuation. Typically, major wildfires on the wetter westside of the Cascades burn every 150 – 300 years. We know now that this fire cycle is changing as a result of climate change with hotter summers and drier conditions – one spark can lead to catastrophic fires.

I urge you to listen to our scientists and to respect nature. Fire is part of the natural cycle in our forest and has been since time immemorial. We need to act first and foremost to protect homes and communities at risk of climate driven wildfires. This means focusing on a few things:

- Adopt fire-wise programs across the state and ensure defensible space close to homes by reducing fuel loads within a 100 feet of homes.
- “Harden” homes to ensure they are more likely to not burn as a result of sparks.
- Strengthen land use regulation where fire risks are high and just as we restrict development in areas prone to flooding so too limit new construction in highly fire prone areas.

We will not win by logging our forests. We need to focus our limited resources on those strategies that have the highest payoff as described above. We can use prescribed burns when/where it makes sense. We do not need to suppress all fires in our wildlands. Again, these fires are part of the natural cycle. Rather we need to focus on those wildfires that become a risk to our communities. This will ensure we use our resources in a wiser, more efficient way and also reduce risks to people, especially our fire-fighters.

Sincerely,
Rand Schenck, Portland, Oregon 97212