



April 7, 2021

To Senate Committee on Natural Resources and Wildlife Recovery

From: Oregon Association of Conservation Districts

Re: Support with Recommended Amendments for SB 762-1

Chair Golden and Committee Members,

The Oregon Association of Conservation Districts (OACD) represents Oregon's 45 Soil and Water Conservation Districts, special districts governed by elected boards. The Districts protect and enhance soil quality, water quality and quantity, and habitat by supporting voluntary conservation in partnership with private landowners and managers as well as federal, state, and nonprofit partners.

OACD supports the broad effort to address wildfire issues through SB 762-1. However, we believe that the bill can be improved per our recommendations herein.

We have two general concerns as follows:

- Wildfire programs need to more explicitly call out the need to protect our critical natural habitats in addition to the traditional economic values of our lands.
- The Department of Forestry is given very broad responsibility but is less familiar with rangeland environments and will need assistance in these areas to carry out its charges. Key issues that affect wildfire in rangeland environments include invasive noxious weeds, wildlife habitat for sensitive species such as sage grouse, and the types of organizations that respond to wildfire.

Following are some specific suggestions for improvement.

Statewide Map of Wildfire Risk

SB 762-1 calls for preparation of a statewide map of wildfire risk. OACD agrees that better risk maps may be helpful but urges caution against spending too many resources on this effort and recommends seeking ways streamline the effort.

We are concerned that SB 762-1 fails to explicitly address our high-quality natural resources in the mapping effort. Examples of natural resources of concern include habitats such as oak woodlands and riparian corridors and species of concern such as sage grouse. We recommend modifying Section 7 paragraph 3 as follows:

(3) To inform the map, the department shall identify statewide wildfire risk classes, consistent with ORS 477.027, based on weather, climate, topography, and vegetation. The map shall take into consideration the risks to human life, structures and infrastructure, and natural resources.

We believe that SB 762-1 should explicitly call out the need for additional expertise in mapping risks in rangeland environments. We recommend modifying Section 7 paragraph 4 as follows:

(4) To develop and maintain the map, the department shall collaborate with Oregon State University, other state agencies, the State Fire Marshal, local governments, federally recognized Indian tribes in this state, other public bodies, insurance companies and any other information sources that the department deems appropriate. In range land settings, the department shall involve local experts in that are familiar with the local environment and local wildfire issues such as Rangeland Fire Protection Districts.

Defensible Space

OACD agrees with the need for improving defensible space. However, we are concerned that it will be difficult to develop requirements that account for protection of natural resources and take into account the site-specific conditions of each property and the benefits of the natural resources. For example, it may be appropriate to have flexibility in riparian corridors, oak woodlands, and wetlands. We recommend modifying Section 8 paragraph 1 as follows:

SECTION 8. (1) The State Fire Marshal shall establish minimum defensible space requirements for wildfire risk reduction on lands in areas identified on the map described in section 7 of this 2021 Act as within the wildland-urban interface. In establishing the requirements, the State Fire Marshal shall consult with the Oregon Fire Code Advisory Board and select standards from the framework set forth in the International Wildland-Urban Interface Code (2020 ed.) published by the International Code Council. Subject to additional local requirements, the requirements shall apply statewide for all lands of the type identified in the map. In consultation with the Oregon Fire Code Advisory Board, the State Fire Marshal shall periodically reexamine the standards set forth in the International Wildland-Urban Interface Code (2020 ed.) and update the State Fire Marshal's standards to reflect current best practices. The requirements for defensible space shall have flexibility to account for preservation of important natural resources.

Resiliency Goal

SB 762-1 lacks a resiliency goal, and a goal should be included. A goal was proposed in SB 248-1. The wording in SB 248-1 needed some improvement to make sure that it does not set up an unfunded mandate at to make sure its scope is sufficiently broad to include all types of natural and working lands. Following is suggested language that should be added into SB 762-1.

It is the policy of this state to advance resiliency in natural and working lands in relation to wildfire. Resiliency is characterized by the ability of lands to recover from wildfire and achieve ecological goals. Resiliency may be achieved by reduction in fuel loads and management practices that improve the characteristics of wildfire when it happens and protect sensitive habitats and species.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide input into your decision-making process.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Stan Dean". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Stan Dean, Advocacy Committee Chair
Oregon Association of Conservation Districts
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