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April 10, 2021

Senator Jeff Golden, Chair
Members of the Committee
Senate Committee on Natural Resources and Wildfire Recovery

RE: Comments on SB762 Wildfire Recovery

Dear Senator Golden and members of the committee:

The Great Old Broads for Wilderness (Broads) is a national grassroots organization, led by women, that engages and inspires activism to preserve and protect wilderness and wild lands. The Cascade-Volcano chapter of the Broads covers NW Oregon and SW Washington. Our chapter is writing in support of Senate Bill 762, with Amendment -3 and the Section 44 of -6, Appropriations of \$150,000,000 for all provisions of the bill. We have some concerns about the final language in the bill, described below.

UTILITIES. We support holding electric utilities accountable. According to recent reporting in the Oregonian, power line ignitions were responsible for over 500,000 acres burning in Oregon. We ask that you prescriptively require power shutoffs in high wind and low humidity conditions. Power Safety Shut-offs, and the conditions when these must happen, need to be in the plans. It is unclear if Section 3-2Ad, "identify a protocol for de-energizing of power lines" actually mandates the utilities to cut off the power when specific conditions such as extreme winds of X force occur.

WILDFIRE MAP, DEFENSIBLE SPACE AND BUILDING CODES. We support the provisions of the bill for creation of a Statewide map of wildfire risk, minimal standards of defensible space around structures to be developed by the State Fire Marshall within high wildfire risk areas, and the requirement of wildfire hazard mitigation building codes in these same designated high wildfire risk areas.

SMOKE FILTRATION SYSTEMS. We appreciate the inclusion of support for public smoke shelters, and assistance for vulnerable residents for home air filtration systems. We suggest that the public smoke shelters have renewable energy with battery back-up, so they are able to function off-grid during electrical grid shut-offs.

REDUCTION OF WILDFIRE RISK. Section 18. The discussion at the informational session of the Committee on 4/7/2021 focused on fuels reduction efforts around communities, which was

stated to be 160,000 acres, with a 10-year plan to implement this initial scope and ongoing work. We support this plan to protect communities. However, this is not what Section 18 currently says. Is the plan to change the wording in an Amendment?

Section 18 as drafted leaves the door open to extensive thinning throughout the forest that would not effectively protect communities but would exacerbate climate change. Instead of widespread thinning operations, we should focus efforts on home hardening, fuel treatments in the areas immediately around communities, and prescribed burning. In the areas that are not immediately around communities, we should be focusing on carbon storage, not thinning.

As the climate changes due to rising atmospheric greenhouse gasses, scientists predict increasing incidence of fire. Forest Service scientists have predicted that, with an average temperature increase of 2 degrees Celsius, the area burned each year in western states will increase by 40-500%. This is a significant concern to us all! But western forests are both altered by climate and have the power to alter the climate. The Great Old Broads asks this committee to ensure that the actions taken to try to reduce fire risk do not indirectly exacerbate fire by driving global climate change.

The Coast Range, West Cascades, and Klamath forests of Oregon are carbon storage power-houses, with more carbon stored per acre than even the forests of the Amazon. But data from a 2011 OSU study showed that a heavily thinned forest holds only half of the above-ground carbon that it held prior to thinning. Much of that carbon lost from the forest will enter the atmosphere in a very short time frame. It takes more than fifty years for that heavily thinned forest to return to the carbon stocks that it held prior to thinning. The landscape-scale thinning that has been proposed in some of the discussions of the Governor's Wildfire Council on 5.6 million acres of Oregon's forests over 20 years, could have a globally significant effect on our climate.

We wish the committee to ensure that this bill does not authorize forest thinning on such a scale, even though the current funding is for appropriate focus on fuel management around communities. We are opposed to wasting money on futile attempts to thin patches of forests in the backwoods or across vast landscapes, with significant ecological impacts. There is less than a 1 percent chance a thinned patch will burn before it grows back. We remain concerned that the wording of this section of the bill, while it prioritizes "home outward" fire protection, does not preclude wide-scale forest thinning.


OREGON WILDFIRE WORKFORCE CORPS. We support the creation of a Wildfire Workforce Corps to provide job training and to help create fire-adapted communities. Senator Golden stated that the Informational session that the funding for the entire bill is likely to be \$150,000,000, and there has been discussion that the Wildfire Workforce Corps could be funded at \$1 million, plus 1:1 match for private funds raised, up to \$10 million. This is a good start and we support this. The Ways and Means Committee has the role of allocating funds for the components of the bill. We cannot afford "all of the above" strategies instead we must

prioritize doing the focused work that will help reduce the risk that our homes and communities will burn down.

CERTIFIED BURN MANAGER PROGRAM. We hope the creation of this program within the Department of Forestry will promote prescribed burning as a fuels management tool and a forest regeneration tool. We hope and expect this will not be logging, piling and burning but rather that it really will result in returning fire to the land as broadcast fire in the understory in the right places at the right time for its benefits.

Summary. The Great Old Broads for Wilderness, Cascade-Volcano Chapter supports Senate Bill 762, Amendment -3, and Section 44 of -6, with refinements and changes in the wording regarding futile attempts to manipulate vast landscapes through mechanical thinning. Thank you to the Committee and all those who have contributed to this bill to comprehensively address community preparation for wildfire.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Darlene Chirman".

Darlene Chirman
Leadership Team, Cascade-Volcano Chapter
Great Old Broads for Wilderness