



April 26, 2021

Co-Chair Sollman, Co-Chair Gorsek and Members of the Joint Public Safety Subcommittee:

After what was the worst wildfire season in state history, with one million acres burned and 4000 homes destroyed, Oregon is already seeing unusual wildfires in our communities early this spring. In light of past and future fire seasons, we write to encourage the legislature to provide adequate resources to the Office of the State Fire Marshal (OSFM), a critical agency that helps keep Oregon's communities safer and more resilient in the face of extreme fire.

Funding

The Office of State Fire Marshal must have the people and funding to engage and work directly with communities to reduce the risk and impact of wildfires. Funding in this budget request will support fire prevention and education efforts, fuels reduction in the wildland urban interface, and the local fire service to better protect communities from catastrophic wildfire.

Staffing

25 limited duration positions were allocated to the OSFM in January and are vital in the wake of significantly longer and more complex fire seasons. It will be critical for this upcoming fire season that those positions are made permanent in the OSFM base budget this year – without this investment by the legislature the needed capacity will not exist for the heart of the upcoming fire season. Many of these positions are field-based to support the Local Fire Service and implement Community Wildfire Risk Reduction. 92% of all Oregonians live within a Fire Service Agency's range.

Policy

SB 762, the Omnibus Wildfire reform, presents the results of a comprehensive review of Oregon's wildfire systems, is anchored in the recommendations from the Governor's Council on Wildfire Response, and enhanced by the lessons from the 2020 wildfire season. Among other agency actions, the bill would task the OSFM to work with counties and local governments to implement defensible space standards statewide, anchored in the foundation of International WUI code and customized for the unique attributes of Oregon's communities. This would include community preparedness and wildfire risk reduction projects adjacent to homes and structures.

In closing, we want to recognize the firefighters and fire service professionals for the work they did last year and the work they are already doing to address early fires and prepare for the full fire season this year. The focus, professionalism, and dedication of those individuals in the field is remarkable, and appreciated. Thank you.