



*The League of Women Voters of Oregon is a 101-year-old grassroots nonpartisan political organization that encourages informed and active participation in government. We envision informed Oregonians participating in a fully accessible, responsive, and transparent government to achieve the common good. LWVOR Legislative Action is based on advocacy positions formed through studies and member consensus. The League never supports or opposes any candidate or political party.*

May 19, 2021

To: Joint Committee on Ways and Means Subcommittee on Natural Resources  
Sen. Kathleen Taylor and Rep. Jeff Reardon, Co-Chairs  
Members of the Subcommittee

Re: **SB 5518** – Dept. of Forestry Budget – **Support with Comments**

**The League of Women Voters of the United States believes that natural resources such as forests and the animals and plants living within them should be managed as interrelated parts of life-supporting ecosystems.** The League understands the many values of our federal, state and private forest lands. We support the state’s Land Use Goal 4, Forest Lands, and understand that our private industrial forests are among the most productive in the nation. Like our manufacturing and our agricultural industrial lands, our private forest industrial lands must be preserved and protected, but we look forward to seeing adoption of forest practices that recognize our changing climate. We also appreciate the value of all our forests as the source of most Oregonians’ drinking water.

We remind the committee of the Department of Forestry’s mission:

*“To serve the people of Oregon by protecting, managing, and promoting stewardship of Oregon’s forests to enhance environmental, economic, and community sustainability.”*

In reviewing the ODF budgets over the past several budget cycles, we bring to your attention that the department has been understaffed for quite some time. The Governor’s budget points out that, in 2001 to 2009, there were over 880 fulltime employees (FTEs) with a high of 980 in 2009. In the current biennium, the number of FTEs is 867 while fire costs have been increasing over the same period of time. The League supports many of the budget requests in SB 5518. With global warming, these costs will only increase until climate issues are addressed. We urge aggressive action this session with policy and budget bills to reduce greenhouse emissions.

The League usually focuses on a narrow group of Policy Option Packages (POPs) for this agency, but the last few years we have engaged in forest policy and wildfire policy so our comments reflect that increased focus. Because there are a number of policy bills now in Ways and Means that overlap with the requested POPs, these POPs cannot be evaluated without considering other pending legislation. However, **we do support the legislature’s investment in addressing both forest policy and fire policy with a multi-agency approach.** We also hope the legislature addresses the reports received on agency fiscal procedures and overall firefighting funding. **We hope the legislature recognizes the problems posed by the agency’s reliance on an “all-hands-on-deck” approach that, with increased fire seasons—both in duration and intensity—mean that the day-to-day work of the agency other than firefighting will continue to be neglected.** That is an underlying factor seen in the Key Performance Measures (KPMs) that missed their targets. **Either these KPMs have value or they should be changed.**

**KPM #3: Forest Practices Act (FPA) Compliance:** Stewardship foresters are tasked with ensuring the current FPA, but the agency's report (see page 139-140 in the agency reference materials) state that *"In 2018 and again in 2019, ODF did not collect data from harvest sites."* Monitoring and enforcement are key to ensuring compliance and encouraging better forest management practices and incentivize forestry program certification participation. We understand that Covid-19 may have affected inspections in 2020, but this is, we believe, both a lack of stewardship foresters to do this work and the "people-borrowing" that Fire Chief Doug Grafe pointed out—these foresters end up fighting fires instead of doing their "regular" work. The KPM report certainly indicates some issues with meeting the target.

**KPM #4: Urban and Community Forest Management:** This target has not been met since 2016. (See pages 141-142 in the agency reference materials.) KPM #4 depends on federal funding ONLY at ODF. With climate change, our urban centers are seeing "heat islands", an issue that LWVOR has pointed out as of critical concern when the state housing rules from HB 2001 (2019) were adopted. (A recent [study](#) demonstrated the link between formerly redlined neighborhoods and excessive heat due to insufficient tree canopy.) As we densify, we need to be sure we continue to have trees and greenery to absorb carbon and help reduce the effects of rising temperatures in our urban areas.

**KPM #7: Private Forestland Management Linked with FPA:** Again, according to the ODF report (pages 145-147 in the agency reference materials), the targets are not being met. According to ODF, they rely on federal funds in order to help industrial and non-industrial forest owners adopt a certified plan on an individual owner basis. It may be that the small woodlands grant program being considered in SB 762 could help the small landowners, at least.

**KPM #8: Forest Stream Water Quality:** This KPM is of primary importance to LWVOR. We note that it also seemed important to the legislature when the target was increased from 25% to 50%. (See page 148-149 in the agency reference materials.) ODF mentions the change in stream flows related to drought, so acknowledging our changing climate may mean more aggressive regulation around our rivers and streams to protect water quality in order to meet the legislature's target.

**KPM #10: State Forests North Coast Habitat:** We seem to be losing ground on achieving complex forest structure. Among Oregon's more important state forests, we hope the agency can find a way to meet this target. (See page 152 in the agency reference materials.)

**Although we address many Policy Option Packages below (some from the Agency Request Budget as well as the Governor's Recommended Budget), we provide them in order of importance to LWVOR.**

**POP 173, Agency Administration/Modernization:** This POP (and POP 200 below) is directly related to addressing the financial management needs recommended in the MGO [report](#). The League recognizes that the agency needs additional dedicated staff in the business office to work year-round to keep track of receivables and payables through a better centralized system. It is recognition of an "under-staffed and over-worked" funding that has existed for this agency for a number of years. Addressing the need for IT investment is also important, although we support the Stage Gate processes set up by the legislature and Dept. of Administration Services and want that process to be part of any IT investment.

**POP 200, Agency Administration/MGO Recommendations:** As with POP 173, this is a critical POP to fund the additional four positions in order to have enough high qualified staff to bill and receive monies related to the increased fires and the complex methods of payments for those fire costs among multiple sources. We support continuation of a contract with MGO to follow the Implementation Management Plan that the agency will use as a guide to meeting the recommendations of the current MGO contract. We also hope that the agency will create a Task Force to address the complicated fire funding issues identified in the [report](#) from Earth Economics.

**POP 160, Partnership & Planning/Climate Change:** For a number of years the agency has “discussed” how our changing climate affects Oregon’s forests, but this POP begins to provide investment to help develop policies that will require changes to the agency’s work. While this POP has 9 FTE, LWVOR believes that only 2 FTE are needed for the agency to do this policy work. The other FTE were meant to assist in defensible space work that may now be included in SB 762 with the Oregon State Fire Marshall’s Office lead.

**POP 172, Agency Administration/DEI:** As with other natural resource agencies, the agency requests staff to assist in meeting diversity, equity and inclusion goals.

**POP 171, Agency Administration/Firefighter Life Safety:** We support an even greater investment in communication systems, not only for our firefighters, but for emergency notifications to all Oregonians. We recognize that the legislature has made some investments and is considering more.

**POP 151 & 152, Private Forests/Sudden Oak:** We wish that the State of California would be as aggressive as Oregon in working to eradicate Sudden Oak Death (SOD). It is critical to both our forest and nursery industries to address this serious pathogen contagion issue. (See also [HB 2663](#).)

**POP 101, Fire Protection/Additional Capacity:** We support additional firefighting capacity to recognize the increase in the number and intensity of fires and the increased length of the fire season. Another fire crew should be considered. Funding for a Youth Workforce Corps that can be our next generation of firefighters and also help increase defensible space should be supported as proposed in [SB 762](#).

**POP 100, Fire Protection/SPA:** We support continuing a Special Purpose Appropriation to allow the Emergency Board to respond to firefighting needs between biennia. This SPA helps with agency cash flow issues caused by delayed federal payments from FEMA and the Bureau of Land Management for services rendered.

**POP 102, Fire Protection/Severity Resources:** We recognize that the state needs a variety of equipment to respond to the increasing size and frequency of large fires. We have a League member who serves on a fire lookout during the summer in Eastern Oregon (one of the few left in the state). We support increasing detection cameras as a cost-effective way to assist with early fire detection. We understand that people all over the world can provide eyes on these cameras!

**POP 130, State Forests:** Every biennium, the League supports investment in our State Forests to increase use of these forests for recreation. This year we also recognize that investment needs to be made to help reforest the Santiam State Forest that was devastated by the Santiam Canyon

fires. We do have concerns about the amount of harvesting being considered in that forest due to the effect on soil health, land stabilization and water sedimentation.

**POP 150, Private Forests/FPA:** We have consistently supported Stewardship Foresters to ensure our outdated Forest Practices Act is adequately enforced. With the need to encourage new practices to increase protection of our rivers and streams and to address climate change, it is even more important that we have forestry staff to work with our private forest owners to ensure they comply with harvest rules. (See comments on KPMs above.)

**POP 174, Agency Administration/Facilities Management:** With the Labor Day wildfires, it will be important to provide staffing for project management and to assure on-going maintenance of current facilities so we do not need to waste monies due to maintenance neglect which often adds to costs at a later time. We recognize the need to replace the Santiam District Office that burned during the Labor Day wildfires and are disappointed that ODOT will no longer co-locate in the Toledo facility.

**POP 170, Agency Administration/2% maintenance:** As with all agencies, we support the 2% deferred maintenance requirement for all agencies.


**Additional issues for your consideration:**

The legislature needs to provide agency funding for the Dept. of Justice (DOJ) to continue work on the Linn County Court lawsuit that could have a major funding impact on Oregon's entire state budget as well as other lawsuits the agency needs to defend. As you have learned with the Water Resources Dept., unless you fund DOJ work, agencies must cut other responsibilities in order to stay within their legislatively adopted budget.

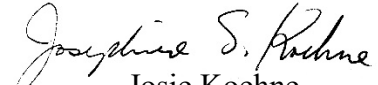
Lastly, we would be remiss if we did not address **the need for funding an omnibus forest/wildfire policy bill**. We support **SB 762** with amendments because we must move swiftly to get a complete and updated set of wildfire risk maps—linked to other bills this session. We need to go beyond the \$5 million in addressing areas around where people live—the wildland urban interface properties—to create defensible space. This effort will save lives and property. **We cannot wait.** We expect that there will be public involvement during the various agency actions, but with 100% of Oregon in drought and the driest April ever in Oregon it is critical for such an omnibus bill pass as well as funding for this agency. We mention this because all of these conversations are linked and, as mentioned at the beginning, it is difficult to provide specific funding amounts for this budget without recognizing the other policy bills under consideration this session related to this agency.

**Until we come together to reduce agency silos and adopt fair revenue policies and tax reforms to adequately plan for and fund services and functions in Oregon, we will continue to govern crisis by crisis and all Oregonians will lose.**

Thank you for the opportunity to discuss this legislation.

  
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