

May 18, 2021

Joint Committee On Ways and Means Subcommittee On Natural Resources
RE: SB 5518

Co-Chairs Representative Reardon and Senator Taylor and members of the committee,

My name is Mike Barsotti. I am a family forest landowner, an ODF retiree who served 24 years on Incident Management Teams, and represented OSWA on the Governor's Council on Wildfire Response's Suppression Committee, and on the Earth Economics' Wildfire Cost Study.

Both the Governor's 2019 Council on Wildfire and the 2021 Wildfire Cost Study conclude that Oregon is well served by ODF's wildfire suppression program. Jim Hubbard, Under Secretary of Agriculture and former Colorado State Forester has stated that Oregon's wildfire organization is the envy of all state forestry organizations.

Oregon does not need a new wildfire suppression system. Its system is complex, but it is this complex public-forest landowner partnership what makes it so efficient and effective. The simplest wildfire suppression systems are like California's where the public pays all wildfire costs.

Both the Governor's Wildfire Council and Wildfire Cost study found ODF's militia style system is cost effective but continual year after year large fires stresses this strategy. Providing for additional ODF resources and finding ways to add individuals from other agencies to this militia approach will reduce the negative impacts on both programs and people in other ODF programs.

The two studies recommend and OSWA agrees that revising wildfire preparation and suppression data collection, terminology and reports will make it easier to tract and understand costs.

OSWA appreciates the investments of GFs made by the E-board. The Wildfire Council stated that "Oregon reduced its firefighting capacities during the Global Financial Crisis, and despite significant escalations in wildfire activity, has not yet regained these losses."

There are multiple reasons for the public and forest landowners to share the costs for the preventing and suppressing wildfires. For example, non-forest landowners caused 93% of the of human caused wildfires. Powerlines are a public resource and a wildfire ignition source. A third reason why the public and forestlands share the cost of paying for the suppression of wildfires it the suppression of fires that start on federal lands and move on to ODF protected lands. They cost Oregon millions and paying for their suppression should not be the sole responsibility of private forest landowners.

OSWA agrees that we need more prescribed fires to help control wildfires. We are un-clear on the need to continuing the MGO contract at this time. Resources would be better spent by working to implement the recommendation found in the Governor's Council on Wildfire and the Wildfire Cost Study.

And finally, in considering the costs of wildfire, not enough attention is given to landowner property losses and the ecological damage to forest resources. The Governor's Council on Wildfire response reported that this damage is 11 times greater than suppression costs.