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Joint Ways and Means Committee on Natural Resources

RE: SB 5518 Appropriate moneys for General Fund to State Forestry Department for certain biennial expenses.

May 19, 2021

Co-Chairs Taylor and Reardon and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for this opportunity and your time to listen to my testimony regarding SB 5518.

My name is Rick Barnes. My wife and I are small woodland owners in Douglas County. I am also a forestry consultant, owning Barnes & Associates, Inc. a natural resource consulting firm in Roseburg and North Bend. I want to share my personal commitment to the complete and coordinated fire protection system in Oregon and describe how this system worked during the 132,000 acre Archie Creek Fire east of Roseburg last September.

As for our personal commitment, we have two Type 6 fire trucks and fire caches, one is staged in Coos Bay and the second one is on our tree farm south of Roseburg. All our field employees are trained in basic fire safety and fire shelter training. We completed this annual training earlier this month. We are not in the fire-fighting business and don't want to be, however, we feel obligated to do our part to help with the complete and coordinated system. We are not alone, many small woodland owners make similar commitments.

On September 7, 2020, a fire started just before midnight near Glide. Shortly after daylight the fire was over 600 acres but was surrounded by fire line due to landowners and Douglas Forest Protection Association's (DFPA) efforts throughout the night. It was a tremendous accomplishment. However, further up the North Umpqua River, other fires had started. The Archie Creek fire was a few acres in size early the morning of the 8th and we had two logging operations going about four miles away. I called the operators at 8:30 and informed them of the Archie Fire, told them it was over four miles away, but due to the extreme fire danger, to keep an eye on it. Shortly after noon on that day both logging operations had burned up.

Although our fires roared, reaching over 60,000 acres in less than a day, three larger fires were burning north of us in Oregon, resulting in very few resources being available for us. If the cities of Glide, Sutherlin, numerous rural communities and our forestlands were going to be saved, it was up to us, the landowners and contractors, to do it. Fortunately, many landowners and contractors had invested the time and expense to train their employees in fire behavior and had entered into pre-season agreements with DFPA to allow operators to begin working the fire immediately. The major landowners worked with DFPA and ODF to identify the desperately needed trained and certified overhead to organize and manage the suppression efforts. Again, it was extremely valuable that many landowners, us included, had trained their foresters to be qualified to be overhead on fires.

A tremendous number of personnel and equipment were mobilized to the fire by local landowners. For the first few days, the fire suppression activities were focused on the areas threatening residences and communities. Thanks to these efforts, the cities of Glide and Sutherlin and many homes were saved. During this time, I spent my time scouting, making plans for suppression efforts for other parts of the fire when equipment became available and in identifying escape routes. A typical day was getting up about 4:00 a.m., downloading the latest infrared imagery available and begin planning. Early morning meetings were held at various landowner's offices, revising daily plans based on the most current data available and preparing maps for the firefighters. These meeting not only included the foresters that were serving in various overhead capacities but included upper management and CEO's. It really was an ALL HANDS ON DECK. These meetings were wrapped up by 6:00 a.m. so the foresters could be at the 7:00 a.m. briefing meetings in the field. Some of the foresters, me included, then returned to Roseburg to begin planning for the following day. Crews worked a minimum of 12 hours with a short meeting at the end of the day outlining the plan for the following day. I would typically get home around 9:00 p.m. and get some rest. This went on for 10 days at no expense to the State of Oregon.

It is important each of you understand the tremendous commitment landowners have to the complete and coordinated system utilized by the State of Oregon. I ask that you consider this as you consider the numerous anti-forestry bills before you, be it:

- Requiring us to pay a higher percentage of the fire preparedness cost, even though most fires are caused by either nature or the general public, please recognize the tremendous commitment and investment we landowners already contribute to the system,
- Requiring us to pay property taxes on our crops: we already pay property tax on the bare land and pay harvest and income taxes when we harvest. There are no other crops assessed property taxes.
- Lastly, taking away our opportunity to tell the true story about forestry in Oregon by doing away or changing the mission of OFRI which is totally paid for by us forest landowners via the Forest Products Harvest Tax.

It is my goal to be able to continue to improve my forestland. I hope you recognize our efforts and in-kind contributions to the complete and coordinated forest fire protection system, above and beyond the 40% that landowners already contribute into the Oregon Forest Land Protection Fund. And don't make it so expensive we can't afford our annual property taxes, fire protection fees and the many annual operating activities required to maintain our forests. I firmly believe we already provide more than our share of services to the State of Oregon and increased burdens are unfair and dangerous policy if we want to keep our forests as forestland.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Rick Barnes