



## Service Employees International Union Local 503

*72,000 public services workers, care providers, and non-profit employees in Oregon.*

**To:** Joint Ways & Means Subcommittee on Natural Resources

**On:** May 19, 2021

**Re:** Senate Bill 5518, Oregon Department of Forestry

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

For the record my name is Courtney Graham, and I am here today on behalf of SEIU Local 503. We represent the workers at the Oregon Department of Forestry, and I am testifying today in support of Senate Bill 5518, the Agency's budget bill.

As we all know, the work that the Department of Forestry does is critical for the State of Oregon. Over the last decade, the severity of fire seasons has increased significantly, with a dramatic increase in acres burned in 2020 during the Labor Day fires. Everything we are hearing about the 2021 fire season is that it has already started in certain parts of our state, and that we will continue to see large fires this year. For this reason, we strongly urge the legislature to make the investments in ODF that the Agency and Governor's office have recommended.

Specifically, SEIU wants to highlight the following investments:

- Package 101: This package includes 27 positions and 28.47 FTE for Fire Protection, to maintain the coordination of the fire protection system across the Agency and state.
- Package 102: This package includes \$20 million general fund to invest in severity resources intended to reduce the size and frequency of large fires.
- Package 171: This package includes \$1.1 million general fund and 2 positions/2 FTE to support critical safety communication and emergency response.
- Package 172: This package includes \$238,000 general fund and 2 positions/2 FTE to addresses Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion needs within the Agency.
- Package 174: This package also includes \$238,000 general fund and 2 positions/2 FTE for capacity needs within facilities maintenance.
- Package 200: This package includes \$440,000 general fund and 4 positions/4 FTE to improve the Agency's financial oversight capacity and improve financial management practices within the Agency, as recommended by MGO.

Additionally, there were a handful of Policy Packages that were not funded in the Governor's Recommended Budget that we would like to ask the committee to reconsider, including:

- Package 150: This package includes \$1.7 million general fund and 12 positions to support sustainable family and community forest practices. This would allow for on-the-ground, in-person technical assistance to landowners to help address key threats and issues on forest land, and increase our state's commitment to responsible environmental stewardship.
- Package 151: This package includes \$1.4 million general fund and 7 positions to support forest practices act implementation on non-federal lands. In speaking with our members, they have expressed concerns about the Department's ability to work with private landowners to be responsible stewards for their land due to limited

- resources. Reconsidering this package would provide more resources to do this work.
- Package 161: This package includes \$3.1 million general fund and 19 positions to support shared stewardship of land that ODF is tasked with under the Federal Forest Restoration Program. At current staffing levels, ODF is not able to meet its obligations and has had to borrow staff from other Divisions to complete the work in Southern Oregon. The goal of this package would be to increase staffing using general fund dollars, and then transition the positions to be 100% federally funded by June 2023.

On behalf of the hardworking folks at the Oregon Department of Forestry, I want to thank you for your time today, and I sincerely hope you will consider supporting some of these additional packages to provide much-needed relief and support to frontline staff as the 2021 fire season gets underway.

Thank you,

Courtney Graham