



Associated Oregon Loggers, Inc.

PO Box 12339 • Salem, Oregon 97309-0339 • (503) 364-1330 • Fax (503) 364-0836

February 3, 2022

The Honorable Kathleen Taylor, Chair
Senate Committee on Labor and Business
Oregon State Capitol
Salem, OR 97301

Subject: SB 1545

Chair Taylor Vice Chair Knopp and Committee Members:

For the record, my name is Sara Nelson and I am the Workforce Development Manager at Associated Oregon Loggers. I have spent most of my career in workforce development and training and have worked to bring economic opportunities to historically underrepresented individuals while working with public-private partnerships for many years. As a native Oregonian, I have always appreciated the natural beauty of this state and I am honored that I now get to advocate for forest operators who keep Oregon green

AOL is the statewide trade association and voice of Oregon's forest operators and represents nearly 1,000 small family forest businesses working daily to steward Oregon forests. These honorable small businesses led by forestry professionals employ more than 22,000 Oregonians who provide sustainable forest management services for Oregon's public and private forestlands, while producing economic stability for their communities and living wage jobs for their employees and families.

AOL is excited about SB 1545 which seeks funding to support opportunities for building new programs to address what is nothing short of a Workforce Crisis. In my role, I work to explore, develop and expand opportunities for workforce development that seeks to grow the state's capacity to address the wildfire and forest healthy crisis and help establish Oregon as an even greater climate change solution. These goals can only be achieved with an adequate forest operator workforce.

To that end, forest operators should be considered as a part of the manufacturing sector due to the fact that the logging NAICS code is associated with the Manufacturing Sector. Additionally, forest operators have many crossover skills with the construction industry which include but are not limited to heavy equipment operations, road construction, CDL certification, and more. The forest operators in the state move the raw material to forest products manufacturing facilities who then deliver those materials to construction workers. Without workforce solutions for forest operators, mills will continually have a difficult time finding contractors and lumber prices will continue to reduce construction opportunities.

AOL's members are a critical link in the forest product supply chain. The forest sector is a vital part of Oregon's economy and Oregon's forest sector is top in the nation! This sector is one of many that is not only known in the US, but around the world. Did you know the forest sector generates more than \$18 billion in base economic output, more than 61,000 total jobs that average \$56,000 a year in wages and around \$8 billion in GDP for Oregon? This accounts for 4.7 percent of total state output, more than 3 percent of state payroll employment and 3.7% of state GDP.

Thankfully, AOL is on the cutting edge of workforce development as we build a Workforce Development Program. In the past 6 months AOL has sought to identify workforce development "best practices" for the forest operator community. Often times they are specific and localized, but we believe many can be replicated across the state, making a lasting and positive impact on rural communities and the health of Oregon's natural and working lands.

AOL believes SB 1545 can provide opportunities for this necessary workforce in Oregon to grow, if and only if, the policy and its focused sectors can be interpreted broadly enough to address workforce needs to meet the wildfire mitigation and climate goals of the Governor and this Legislature by including forest operators.

With new 5–10-year federal funding for mechanical fuels reduction, prescribed fire and other restoration and wildfire mitigation activities in the Federal Infrastructure Investments and Jobs Act and a state focus on reducing catastrophic wildfires by investing in landscape resiliency, defensible space regulations and wildland-urban interface treatment, there is a critical need to develop and grow forest contracting capacity to implement these goals. The Oregon Department of Forestry is also pursuing development of a 20-Year Strategic Plan to address wildfire and forest health on all lands in Oregon while the US Forest Service recently unveiled their 10-year strategy called “Confronting the Wildfire Crisis: A Strategy for Protecting Communities and Improving Resilience in America’s Forests”. As many people work to increase funding for this type of work, it has become increasingly apparent that workforce solutions are not being developed alongside the funding. AOL’s Forest Policy Manager, Amanda Astor, outlined in a [recent article published in the Register-Guard](#), the workforce capacity needs and opportunities to achieve these wildfire and climate related goals.

We hope this testimony and the description below can help show this legislature that AOL is prepared to be the lead of forest operator workforce development and that we have a plan that could be expanded by SB 1545.

Here is a list of innovative programs which could be expanded through the investment outlined in SB 1545:

- The Port of Morrow has an incredible Youth Internship program which supports Juniors and Seniors in obtaining paid (max 15hrs / week) internships in positions in the local community. Many of the students who pursue these internships might not have otherwise stayed in school, but find purpose and worth through this opportunity. The students must maintain a minimum 2.0 GPA (as with student athletes) and employers are able to host and train their future workforce. Some of the student end up going to college, but others graduate from high school, get a job and go to work with real-world experience. This is a prime example of a successful workforce partnership that engages the local STEM HUB, Port, Schools, Employers and more.
- The OSU Lane County Extension Forester has developed a virtual training program that utilizes an Oculus platform based on the “gamification of learning” which engages students of all ages to ‘play’ in a work scenario and experience a taste of the work they could experience as a forest operator. This type of gamification learning can lead to further interest in development of forest operator skills.
- Finally, Baker Technical Institute has a proposed “Timber Academy” based on their Heavy Highway training (but with Logging specific equipment) which would provide simulator training, safety, soft skills and career preparation., The Institute is also contemplating adding Flagger Certification and other targeted certificates to advance employee skills.

We bring these opportunities forward in testimony to help this Committee see the possibilities for involvement of the forest operating community in SB 1545’s implementation.

Workforce challenges in this sector include misinformation about logging and the forest sector, a lack of understanding about the career pathways in forest operation companies, assumptions that working in the woods will be akin to recreation and more. AOL is working to change the narrative by working with students from elementary through college to fill these information gaps and help broaden student understanding of forest sector career paths. Passing SB 1545 would give a much-needed boost to the forest operator community to bring back careers which have seen a steady decline and would benefit from technical educational opportunities.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on our views of SB 1545. We hope this Committee sees AOL as the backbone of forest operator workforce development in Oregon and discusses amendment of SB 1545 to specifically include our sector to address Oregon’s wildfire mitigation and climate change objectives across the state. Although we will continue to work

with workforce boards, community partners and HECC, we would like clarity in the bill that organizations like AOL will also have independent access to the capitol and other workforce resources outlined in SB 1545.

Graciously,

Sara Nelson

Sara Nelson (she/her/hers)
Workforce Development Manager
2015 Madrona Ave SE
Salem, OR 97302
Office: 503.364.1330
Email: snelson@oregonloggers.org