



OREGON STATE FIRE FIGHTERS COUNCIL

International Association of Fire Fighters
AFL-CIO CLC

December 11, 2024

Joint Interim Special
Committee on Wildfire Funding

Co-Chair Senator Kate Lieber
Co-Chair Representative Tawna Sanchez
Committee Members

Co-Chairs,

Good morning, for the record, I'm Karl Koenig, President of the Oregon State Fire Fighters Council. We are over 3800 career fire fighters, paramedics, wildland fire fighters, fire prevention and specialty rescue professionals throughout Oregon.

We are testifying in favor of the Legislative Finance Office (LFO) \$212 Million dollar request from two agencies, the Oregon Department of Forestry (ODF) and the Office of the State Fire Marshal (OSFM).

As an active participant in the Wildfire Funding Group, SB 5709 the fire fighters are not excluding any ideas for funding Wildfire expenses moving into the future. This testimony is not to profess answers but to seek advocacy in keeping our two partners economically solvent while allowing the Legislature to use its subject matter experts, the group commonly referred to as the "Fire 35". The Fire 35 will produce meaningful and prescriptive solutions and recommendations for the Legislature and Governor to consider moving this natural resource challenge forward. The monies LFO recommended is the first step in creating a system that reflects the challenging nature of fire management, suppression and mitigation efforts with the appropriate funding, common goals of resiliency, affordability, resource preservation while keeping Oregon's citizens and visitors safe and able to enjoy all of Oregon well into the future.

This year's fire activity, like none other tested our professions limit with over 2000 fires, almost 2 million acres lost to fire and yet we made it to October. At our peak there were over 10,000 fire fighters at fires throughout Oregon. That is double the amount of career and seasonal hires between ODF and DSFM office seasonal hires, while still answering the requests for service at home. Firefighting is a labor-intensive operation and requires staffing to make it effective. Those tenets are reinforced on each of the rapid response Pre-positioned resources placed by the DSFM and their partners, Oregon's Fire Districts and City Fire Departments, who respond regardless of the situation.

Keep small fires small is another tenet that we use to minimize loss, prevent large scale fires from ever happening, response times matter, unfortunately it is also not free.

The all-hazard response provided by Oregon's Fire Districts and departments begins each day with approximately 900 firefighting and EMS personnel. That staffing level is approximately 400 fire fighters and 100 paramedics short of national standards every day. Reflect on having ten times that amount fighting fires here in Oregon this summer. The magnitude of this effort is impressive given those fire fighters on the line whether at home or on a conflagration continued to respond wherever and whenever needed.

The fire service in Oregon is steep in tradition and serving the public regardless of the nature or need. It is the Legislature's time to act on this increasing threat to all Oregonians and its visitors. At no other time in our fire service history have we come together and articulated our collective need to save our state from the ravages of fire. We use terms like "All hands-on deck" or "General Alarm" to signify our need. That time is now, including our elected officials to fund fire suppression, management and mitigation appropriately. Please adopt the LFO recommendation for both agencies in the "gross" amount to begin the long-term adaptability and process of living with and successful management of fire in Oregon.

Thank you for the opportunity to advocate on behalf of the Oregon Fire Service and its fire fighters today.

I can answer any comments or questions

Regards
Karl Koenig
President
Oregon State Fire Fighters Council