

**Opening Comments by Glenn Casamassa, Regional Forester,  
USDA Forest Service Pacific Northwest Region**

**Oregon Senate Committee on Natural Resources**

**January 30, 2023**

Good morning, Chairman Goldman, Vice-Chair Girod, and members of the Committee. My name is Glenn Casamassa, and I am the Regional Forester for the USDA Forest Service's Pacific Northwest Region. I am joined here today with Chad Davis, our Regional Director for State and Private Forestry.

I want to begin by thanking the Legislature, Governor's Office, and State agencies for your active participation and partnership in the management of our National Forests. We appreciate this opportunity to testify alongside our Oregon Department of Forestry and federal partners. The mutual cooperation and assistance we enjoy with ODF, the State Fire Marshal, municipal fire protection districts, universities, and local government leaders is essential to the work we do, particularly around wildfire management. We are grateful for the strong and effective relationships we enjoy with our partners here in Oregon and are committed to continuing to strengthen that partnership.

[FEDERAL RESPONSIBILITIES]

The Pacific Northwest Region of the USDA Forest Service manages over 16 million acres of public lands in Oregon across eleven National Forests, one National Scenic Area, two National Recreation Areas, a National Grassland, and a National Volcanic Monument.

We take great pride in protecting and conserving these natural resources while meeting our Congressional mandate to manage national forests for multiple uses, including outdoor recreation, range, timber, drinking water, and wildlife and fish habitat.

In managing these public lands, we are required to follow Federal laws and regulations, such as Title 16 of the U.S. Code, the National Forest Management Act, National Environmental Policy Act, Endangered Species Act, the Clean Air Act, and more.

Our team works closely with their ODF counterparts to ensure a mutual understanding of the federal and state laws and policies that govern natural resources in Oregon. We've found that when these laws and policies work together, and federal and state agencies work together, it helps ensure the best outcomes and the sustainable management of all of Oregon's forests.

#### [WILDFIRE CRISIS]

A clear example of where federal and state agencies and partners are mutually supportive is in how we manage wildfires and wildfire mitigation.

Over the last 20 years, wildfires have been growing in size, duration, and severity. From the tragic Labor Day Fires of 2020 to the unusual, late season wildfires we experienced last year, each season has been different and deeply impactful, as members of this committee know personally.

Our highest priority is the safety of the public and our firefighters. Every fire receives a strategic, risk-based response. Each strategy uses the full spectrum of management actions that consider fire and fuel conditions, weather, values at risk, resource availability, and land management plans and designations.

If the situation is too dangerous or if the likelihood of success is low, the Forest Service will not commit firefighters to those operations. Even when we cannot commit resources to a wildfire, we monitor fire activity and changing conditions, and continually reassess our management actions. In every case, the fire is managed.

Our goal is to minimize the number of large devastating and destructive wildland fires. Local federal and non-federal resources work together whenever possible to contain these fires safely and effectively. Because of these efforts, both nationally and similarly here in the Pacific Northwest Region, 98% of wildland fires are contained within 24-hours of initial response.

[WILDFIRE CRISIS – FUELS REDUCTIONS]

Implementing the National Cohesive Wildland Fire Management Strategy with our partners to restore and maintain resilient landscapes, create fire-adapted communities, and provide safe and effective wildfire response requires ongoing, year-round work.

The Forest Service has intensified its efforts to address the wildfire crisis in the West and reduce wildfire risk to communities. We are actively working with our partners to increase fuels and forest health treatments across three of the highest risk landscapes in Oregon, which include the Mt. Hood, Deschutes, Ochoco, and Fremont-Winema national forests. These landscapes will collectively receive more than \$30 million this fiscal year in Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) and Inflation Reduction Law (IRL) funding to reduce fuels on over 44,000 acres of high-risk lands and complete the planning necessary to continue this accelerated pace and scale of treatments in upcoming years.

In addition to the unprecedented investments being made through SB762, BIL, and IRL funding, we continue to work with ODF to implement the Oregon Governor's wildfire council recommendations from 2019 and the initiatives set forth in SB762. Through collaboration in the Landscape Resiliency program, Joint Chief's projects, use of the Good Neighbor Authority, and other initiatives, the Forest Service has increased our treatments in the Northwest from an average of approximately 250,000 acres annually to an average of more than 270,000 acres annually.

Changes to Oregon's state smoke management rule and increased workforce capacity have enabled us to increase the acres of prescribed burning from just under 65,000 acres annually across the region to upwards of 90,000 acres annually when conditions permit.

[WORKING TOGETHER – HISTORY OF WORKING TOGETHER; OPPORTUNITIES TO COME]

State and local officials here in Oregon have been invaluable partners in each of these endeavors. Nearly \$26 million of Forest Service appropriated and supplemental funds were provided to ODF in FY22 for a variety of programs, including supporting wildland fire

preparedness on State and private lands, increasing Rural Fire Districts' wildland firefighting capabilities, and assisting with the new Community Wildfire Defense Grant program. The Forest Service is also providing \$6 million annually to the State of Oregon to implement Good Neighbor Agreements, and ODF in turn will take the lead on completing a number of critical fuel projects on National Forest System lands. Other examples of important partnerships with Oregon include convening managers for pre-season interagency fire simulation and post-fire after action review exercises and encouraging consideration of wildfire risks in local planning and zoning through the FireWise Communities program.

In addition to funds provided to ODF, in FY22 the Forest Service awarded \$5.7 million in competitive grants to eight private businesses to develop markets and increase the use of wood products across the state.

We seek to continue building on our successes working together, learning from past experience, and exploring new ways to expand our collective ability to reduce the threat of catastrophic wildfire on our forests and communities.

[CLOSING]

Thank you for inviting the Forest Service to present to you today. We appreciate this committee's support of the USDA Forest Service's partnership with your state. I turn over my time to Barry Bushue, and I welcome your questions after the presentation or in writing after today's session.