



Written Testimony of Joseph Vaile, Klamath Siskiyou Wildlands Center

House Committee on Climate, Energy, and Environment

Public Hearing: House Bills 2985 & 2986

Wednesday, January 25, 2023

3:00 p.m.

Chairwoman Marsh, Vice-Chairs Levy, and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony in support of House Bills (HB) 2985 and 2986. These bills include important measures that will help facilitate the use of more cultural burning and controlled fire. Increasing the pace and scale of cultural burning and prescribed fire (hereafter, controlled burning) is desperately needed to prepare our communities for climate enhanced wildfires, restore forest ecosystem climate resilience, and provide for greater Tribal sovereignty.

My name is Joseph Vaile, and I am the Climate Program Director for the Klamath Siskiyou Wildlands Center. We are based in southwest Oregon. KS Wild launched a Climate Program in 2019 to address the increasing threats posed by climate change to the region. Our program proactively engages with local communities, allies, and decision makers in order to advance natural climate solutions.¹ The increased occurrence and severity of wildfire is a result of several factors, including climate change. Wildfires have struck our region repeatedly - including in urban areas causing catastrophes. Most devastating was the 2020 Almeda fire that destroyed lives and homes in Rogue Valley communities surrounding and within Talent and Phoenix, Oregon.

KS Wild is deeply engaged in authentic forest collaboration efforts and fire protection in southern Oregon. We have helped lay the foundation for forest collaboration, and today we work closely with the community based collective action groups including the Wild Rivers Coast Forest Collaborative, Illinois Valley Fire Resilience Oversight Group and

¹ LC 3026, submitted to the Oregon legislature in 12/22, defines a “Natural climate solution” as a practice that “enhances or protects the ability of natural and working lands to sequester and store carbon, or reduces greenhouse gas emissions from natural and working lands, while maintaining or increasing climate resilience, human well-being and biodiversity.”

the Applegate Valley Forest and Fire Working Group. We also work on wildfire education and have released a *Forest and Fire Toolkit* filled with invaluable resources on wildfire-related agencies, wildfire mitigation funding sources, and how-to tips on fire prevention around homes and rural properties. I have also personally supported the formation of the first Prescribed Burn Association in the state of Oregon: the Rogue Valley Prescribed Burn Association that fosters community safety and preparedness, ecological land stewardship, and resilient ecosystems by educating and training community members in the use of controlled burning.

KS Wild strongly supports HB 2985. HB 2985 establishes a \$10 million liability fund for controlled burns on a pilot basis. In the rare event of a controlled burn escape, it would provide reimbursements to landowners. These are extremely rare events. According to the U.S. Forest Service, they conduct an average of 4,500 controlled burns projects annually and 99.84% go according to plan.² That equals slightly more than one escape per every 1,000 controlled burns.

We should work to ensure that no controlled burns escape, but the best science tells us that we don't have a choice - we must increase the use of controlled fire. Mechanical treatments can help reduce fire severity, but in order to be effective, these almost always need to be followed up with a controlled burn.³ It is important to note that mechanical treatments come with their own safety concerns.⁴ Access issues prevent us from removing biomass and disposing off site in vast landscapes, steep slopes, and other inaccessible areas.⁵ Simply put, if we are going to meet this moment and protect our communities and restore forest resiliency, controlled fire is the best, most effective tool and we need to greatly increase its use.

KS Wild also strongly supports HB 2986 to create a \$5 million Prescribed Fire Capacity Grant Program. This would increase the pace and scale of controlled burns in Oregon by offering voluntary incentives to landowners, Tribal fire practitioners, local governments, and nongovernmental organizations to increase their capacity to use fire as a management tool.

² Moore, R. "From the Chief's Desk: Reviewing our prescribed fire program." U.S. Forest Service. May 2022.

³ Vaillant, N.M.; Fites-Kaufman, J.A.; Stephens, S.L. Effectiveness of prescribed fire as a fuel treatment in Californian coniferous forests. *Int. J. Wildland Fire* 2009, 18, 165–175.

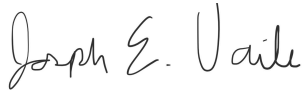
⁴ Pratt, D.S. Occupational Health and the Rural Worker: Agriculture, Mining and Logging. *The Journal of Rural Health* 1990, 6: 399-418.

⁵ USDA Forest Service. A strategic assessment of forest biomass and fuel reduction treatments in Western States. Gen. Tech. Rep. RMRS-GTR-149. Fort Collins, CO: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service, Rocky Mountain Research Station. 2005.17 p.

HB 2985 and 2986 address important obstacles to the increased use of responsible controlled burning. HB 2985 would ensure that in the rare event that landowners who may be affected by escaped burns are compensated. HB 2986 would ensure that there are resources available to begin the process of growing the pace and scale of controlled burning.

Consequently, KS Wild strongly supports HB 2985 and 2986 and urges the Committee to report out this legislation. We look forward to working with the State and other partners to provide incentives and resources to help private landowners and Tribal burn practitioners increase the use of safe and effective controlled burns.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Joseph E. Vaile".

Joseph Vaile, Climate Director

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