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Joint Committee on Ways and Means Subcommittee on Natural Resources

Testimony in support of HB 5020, Department of Forestry Budget

Submitted by Pete Caligiuri, Oregon Forest Strategy Director

Co-Chair Denbrow, Co-Chair Pham, and Members of the Subcommittee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on House Bill 5020, the budget for the Department of Forestry for the 2023-2025 biennium. The Nature Conservancy (TNC) is a science-based, non-partisan organization, with over 80,000 supporters in Oregon alone, committed to conserving the lands and waters on which all life depends. Throughout the state, our staff manage lands and waters in varied ecosystems and partner with ranchers, farmers, fishers, timber, and environmental interests to tackle the most challenging conservation issues facing people and nature.

Our staff is comprised of scientists, conservation practitioners, land stewards, and fire managers based in communities across the state. Our Forest team focuses on the ecology and restoration of Oregon's dry forests, working closely with the Oregon Department of Forestry (ODF) as well as local, state, federal, and tribal partners to inform best practices to increase landscape resilience, reduce wildfire risk to communities, and to sustain the many benefits that healthy ecosystems provide to nature and people.

Oregon, like much of the Western U.S. is experiencing ever-more intense wildfire seasons driven by longer, hotter, and drier summers. As a result, our forests, rangelands, and surrounding communities, are increasingly vulnerable to severe wildfire and smoke impacts. It is important we address this challenge through a comprehensive approach that ensures ODF has adequate funding, resources, and capacity to not only manage and implement programs, but to maximize state investments through the capture of federal match dollars. TNC supports the state's continued investments in holistic, science-based treatments to reduce the risk of extreme wildfire to forests and communities and encourage you to prioritize the following funding options as you consider the budget for this agency:

Federal Forest Restoration Program (FFRP): The FFRP has a proven track record of accelerating the pace, scale, and quality of forest restoration on federal lands in Oregon. We request fully funding the FFRP at the continuing service level to ensure ODF can assist its federal land management partners in the planning, implementation, and monitoring of forest restoration treatments that simultaneously increase forest health and reduce the risk of extreme wildfire. The FFRP leverages collaborative efforts,

providing a more streamlined approach to receive and leverage federal funds, such as Good Neighbor Authority (GNA), and maximize state investments in forest management. TNC supports building agency capacity to adequately capture and implement federal funds from the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) and Inflation Reduction Act (IRA). Without this investment in capacity and inter-agency coordination, Oregon could potentially lose out on millions of federal dollars that could fund critical forest management and restoration projects. This is an opportunity for Oregon to demonstrate its commitment to shared stewardship, collaborative strategies, and continued investment in Oregon's forests.

Landscape Resilience Program (LRP): The LRP was established through SB 762 and works to improve forest restoration and resilience, providing grants to fund landscape-scale projects that reduce wildfire risk on both public and private forestlands. Funding from the first round of the LRP investments went to nine projects spanning nearly every corner of the state, where the implementation of a range of mechanical thinning, hazardous fuels, and prescribed fire treatments has benefitted both the ecosystems and the communities that depend on them. The program was funded at \$20 million in the 2021-2023 biennium but was reduced by nearly \$8 million in the Governor's Recommended Budget for 2023-2025. TNC requests the program funding be restored to \$20 million, to sustain implementation of projects and to provide potential state match for significant federal investments already coming to Oregon through the IRA and IIJA.

Small Forestland Grant Program (SFGP): Created through SB 762, the SFGP provides voluntary incentives for small landowners to reduce wildfire risk on their properties, through strategies outlined in the Cohesive Wildfire Strategy. Funds from this program went to 23 small forestland owners and 20 Firewise Communities in support of their work to reduce the risk of extreme wildfire. The Small Forestland Grant Program was funded at \$5 million for 2021-2023 but was reduced to \$2 million in the Governor's Recommended Budget for the 2023-2025 biennium. TNC requests that this program's funding be restored to the full \$5 million requested in the ODF Agency Request Budget, to provide potential state match for significant federal investments already coming to Oregon through the IRA and IIJA.

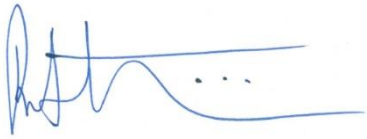
Private Forest Accord Development (PFA)-POP 106: TNC supports funding to enable ODF to continue the work to implement Senate Bill 1501 (2022) and the historic agreements reached through the PFA to update elements of Oregon's private forest management practices.

Climate-smart Forestry and Climate Action: TNC supports ODF's continued commitment to mitigating climate impacts within their forest management and restoration programs. SB 530 directs state agencies to incorporate natural climate solutions into their missions, programmatic investments, and performance metrics and to work across agencies to identify opportunities to leverage natural climate solutions strategies within their work. We urge the state to invest in increasing agency capacity through the addition of more full-time staff and/or the transition of limited-duration positions to more full-time positions, ensuring that the agency not only has staff to implement programs, but to provide support in tracking federal funding opportunities, writing and managing grants, monitoring programs, and integrating community feedback into programs.

TNC is committed to working with ODF leadership to ensure the agency has the funding, the position authority, and the staff capacity to manage and implement these critical programs. This is particularly important at this unique moment in time, as historic levels of federal funding are being made available

and Oregon has the opportunity to maximize its investment through the capture of federal funds from the IRA and the IIJA. This leverage will be essential in funding this work given both the urgency and the scale of the need. We cannot afford to let this moment pass us by. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on ODF's budget and for your continued investment in Oregon's forests for current and future generations.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Pete Caligiuri', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Pete Caligiuri
Forest Strategy Director
The Nature Conservancy in Oregon