



March 21, 2023

To: Senate Committee on Natural Resources

Re: SB 872 – Relating to the prevention of wildfire in federal forests

American Forest Resource Council (AFRC) is a regional trade association whose purpose is to advocate for sustained yield timber harvests on public timberlands throughout the West to enhance forest health and resistance to fire, insects, and disease. We do this by promoting active management to attain productive public forests, protect adjoining private forests, and assure community stability. We work to improve federal and state laws, regulations, policies and decisions regarding access to and management of public forest lands and protection of all forest lands. AFRC represents over 50 forest product businesses and forest landowners throughout the West. The state of Oregon's forest sector employs approximately 61,000 Oregonians, with AFRC's membership directly and indirectly constituting a large percentage of those jobs. Rural communities are particularly sensitive to the forest product sector in that more than 50% of all manufacturing jobs are in wood manufacturing.

The need to accelerate active management on federal forest land throughout Oregon is well documented. The Forest Service unveiled its Wildfire Crisis Strategy in January 2022, which is paving a course for expanding its active management footprint by 20 million acres. Landscapes in Oregon targeted for accelerated treatments include lands managed on the Deschutes, Mt Hood, and Fremont-Winema National Forests. Despite the infusion of federal funding directed at achieving these goals, the Forest Service still asserts that they are well short of the resources necessary to deliver on them.

SB 872 aims to address these federal resource shortages by expanding the state's ability to partner with the Forest Service. Partnership between Oregon Department of Forestry (ODF) and the Forest Service began in March 2016 when a Master Good Neighbor Agreement was signed. This agreement was renewed and extended through 2032. Through this agreement, the Federal Forest Restoration (FFR) program was formed to accelerate the pace, scale and

quality of forest restoration in Oregon's federal forests and has become an essential component that most National Forests in Oregon rely on for planning and implementing forest health treatments, particularly those that reduce the risk of high intensity wildfire.

SB 872 seeks to expand certain activities, such as mechanical thinning and ladder fuel reduction, currently authorized under the existing partnership with federal funds. A key component of the success of the FFR program is its funding source through a combination of both state and federal investments. Recently, the Forest Service has acted on this commitment of shared funding by directing a portion of the funds provided by the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and Inflation Reduction Act to the state. The “resource shortages” that the Forest Service highlights in their Wildfire Crisis Strategy are not funding resources, they are workforce resources. The critical need is appropriate hiring authority that would allow ODF to fill the positions necessary to turn these federal funds into increased mechanical thinning and ladder fuel reduction treatments.

We are encouraged by the intent of SB 872 and are happy to work with the committee to ensure that it addresses the barriers to delivering on its goals of expanding active forest management on federal forest land.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Andy Geissler".

Andy Geissler  
Federal Timber Program Director  
American Forest Resource Council