



*Facilitating restoration projects on public and private forestland in Klamath and Lake Counties through education, outreach, and diverse partnerships*

April 11, 2023

Joint Subcommittee on Natural Resources

**Re: SB 5539 - Reallocation of unspent wildfire recovery funds in OWEB's budget**

Dear Co-Chairs Dembrow and Pham and Members of the Subcommittee:

The Klamath-Lake Forest Health Partnership (KLFHP) is a collaborative group of Federal, State, and local agencies, industrial timber, NGOs, and private landowners focused on cross-boundary forestland management and wildfire recovery in Klamath and Lake Counties. Our counties have experienced over 930,000 acres of wildfire since 2000. In 2020 and 2021, we experienced 5 major fires across Federal and private land, including the 242, Brattain, Cougar Peak, Patton Meadow, and Bootleg Fires. Back to back major fire years demonstrated that much work is needed to develop and deliver post-fire recovery support and infrastructure across all ownerships.

Our partners have effectively secured more than \$6.5 million in multiple grants for all of these fires funded through the Oregon legislature and administered by OWEB. Work done to date has reduced the spread of noxious weeds, prepared sites for seed and seedlings, protected vulnerable waterways from cattle access, and reduced stream erosion. This funding jumpstarted partnerships and projects that have continued to grow, not only in recovery from these fires, but to ready our landscapes and our efforts for future fires. We have identified capacity issues and other hurdles and are working together as a collaborative to resolve those challenges for our region.

Recent grant cycles for wildfire recovery funds presented opportunities to build on previous emergency efforts and to continue towards restoration; however, since these funds have come during the winter 2022/2023, feet of snow throughout most of the fire footprints in our counties have meant that work cannot be accomplished until late spring or summer. Furthermore, considering the scale and intensity of these fires, it is critical to allow enough time to plan and adaptively manage all of our recovery efforts to ensure the best return on investment and long-term resiliency. Without reallocation to the next biennium, as much as \$5 million in planned post-fire restoration and recovery projects could be lost to the detriment of our forests, watersheds, communities, and economy.

**The KLFHP, on behalf of 21 signatory partners, requests the legislature to support SB 5539 and to include unspent wildfire recovery balances in a reallocation in OWEB's 2023-2025 budget.**

Sincerely,

*Mike Bechdolt*

Mike Bechdolt (Apr 11, 2023 18:23 PDT)

Mike Bechdolt

President