



Co-Chair Lew Frederick
Co-Chair Susan McLain
Joint Committee On Ways and Means Subcommittee On Education
900 Court St. NE
Salem, OR 97301

April 19, 2023

RE: HB 5025 – Support for funding Oregon Conservation Corps

Dear Co-Chair Frederick and Co-Chair McLain, and members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on the Higher Education Coordinating Commission's (HECC) budget. I am writing to respectfully encourage this Committee to restore funding to the Oregon Conservation Corps (OCC) as requested in HECC 2023-2025 Agency Budget Request Policy Option Package 301. I write on behalf of Lomakatsi Restoration Project, a recipient of OCC grant funding.

Lomakatsi is a nonprofit, grassroots organization that for 28 years has worked within low-income, forest-based and tribal communities throughout Oregon and northern California to create social equity and sustainable economic opportunities by restoring dry forest ecosystems and creating fire adapted communities. Lomakatsi employs over 80 full time forestry, ecology, and fire professionals in our work addressing hazardous fuels in and around communities, across 20,000 acres each year on private, federal, and tribal lands.

Lomakatsi is working with a diverse range of state and federal agencies, Tribal Nations, nonprofits, community members, and other partners to address the increasing frequency and severity of wildfire in Oregon. Nowhere is this risk more pronounced than in the communities of southern Oregon, where in September 2020 a series of unprecedented wildfires claimed lives and property—with the Almeda Fire alone destroying over 2,400 homes and businesses. That same season, the Two Four Two fire burned at high severity directly adjacent to the community of Chiloquin, Oregon, narrowly missing the town and the center of the Klamath Tribal Community.

The urgent need for hazardous fuels reduction within the Wildland Urban Interface of the many Oregon communities at high risk of wildfire cannot be overstated. For example, out of the 4.6 million acres within the Rogue Basin, over 1.1 million acres of overly dense forests have been identified as in need of ecologically-based treatments. In order to meet this need, we need to not only increase investments in this work, but also in building more capacity in forestry and wildland fire workforces at the local, regional, and state levels.

OCC does an excellent job of accomplishing both the much-needed fuels reduction work on the ground, as well as creating training and workforce development opportunities for young adults. Through OCC funding, Lomakatsi was able to expand our Youth Ecological Forestry Training & Employment Program to serve 20 young adults, half from the tribal community in Klamath County and half from Jackson County, in two 18-week sessions. Over the course of the program, participants earn nationally-recognized certifications in wildland fire, chainsaw operation, CPR and First Aid, and – for tribal youth – cultural resource monitoring. These young adults are working on nationally-recognized, collaborative,

ecological fuels reduction and wildfire mitigation initiatives such as the West Bear All-Lands Restoration Project, gaining hands-on, career-boosting experience while helping to protect communities and the ecosystem. For many young adults in our OCC-funded program, the experience has been nothing short of life changing.

The Oregon Conservation Corps is a necessary investment in wildfire resiliency and a future wildfire workforce for the state of Oregon. The OCC model creates meaningful, living-wage work experiences that provide the foundation for the next generation of workers in the forest, supporting fire management and the growing ecological forestry industry. It also provides a fully-funded workforce with the flexibility to accomplish fuels reduction work where it is needed most, allowing for strategic leverage with existing collaborative wildfire mitigation efforts that include state investment.

We respectfully urge the Committee to fully fund the HECC's Policy Option Package 301 which includes \$10 million for the Oregon Conservation Corps and \$2 million dedicated to Tribal Youth Corps funding, to build upon the impressive start and momentum of OCC. This is a wise forward thinking investment for both forest and community resilience, and for the youth of Oregon.

Sincerely,



Marko Bey
Founder & Executive Director
Lomakatsi Restoration Project