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Senate Committee On Natural Resources and Wildfire

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The Nature Conservancy is a science-based, non-partisan organization, with more than 80,000 supporters spread across every county of our great state. TNC is pleased to support Senate Bill 1511, which Directs the State Fire Marshal to establish a neighborhood protection cooperative grant program, a core component of an overall community risk reduction strategy.

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.

Much of the work this session will be focused on housing and homelessness, but those investments will remain at risk without a comprehensive strategy and funding to mitigate risks from wildfire to homes and communities, protect vulnerable populations from wildfire smoke, and implement science-based ecological forest restoration to help Oregon's dry fire-adapted forests be more resilient to extreme wildfire. In fact, more than \$12.7 billion worth of homes in Oregon are currently at risk from wildfire, with smoke and air pollutants posing serious threats to human health and damage to tourism and economic development.

Senate Bill 1511 establishes grant programs to incentivize landowners to support implementation of defensible space, home hardening, and other fuels reduction treatments, all proven best practices to mitigate wildfire risk and reduce home exposure and susceptibility to future wildfires. These state investments are particularly important at this unique moment in time, as these funds can be used as match to the significant federal funding flowing to Oregon through programs such as USDA Community Wildfire Defense Grant and FEMA Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities programs.

While larger conversations around permanent wildfire funding are happening this short session, we look to Senate Bill 1511 and the broader suite of funding priorities included in our Funding Priorities for a Fire-Resilient Oregon to fill gaps in our wildfire programs while we explore more durable solutions. In particular, I'd like to draw attention to gaps in the Community Risk Reduction Fund and Landscape Resiliency Fund that were established by SB 80. We have provided a one-page summary of our Funding Priorities for a Fire-Resilient Oregon package.

Senator Golden, thank you for your leadership in keeping wildfire at the forefront of conversation in the capital and across Oregon. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today and we urge your support for Senate Bill 1511.