



House Revenue: HB – 4133

Chair Nathanson, Vice-Chairs Reschke and Walters, members of the committee, my name is Kyle Williams and I'm the Director of Forest Protection at the Oregon Forest Industries Council. Thank you for the opportunity to talk about the workgroup's process for HB-4133.

About this time last year, the Department of Forestry was beginning their annual budgeting process, without a very significant portion of funding that had been available in the 21-23 biennium: what we called Senate Bill 762 landowner offset dollars. This money had been allocated as part of SB 762 to mitigate financial impacts to landowners when the Legislature made historic investments in response to the statewide challenge of wildfire. When those offset dollars went away, it dramatically increased costs for landowners of every size and type in every corner of the state. As the session wound down, those same landowners desperately voiced that they simply couldn't bear the cost pressure of carrying the wildland fire protection system of this state on their backs any longer.

Senator Steiner heard that message and made a focused decision to convene a workgroup that intentionally brought representatives of each type of ownership to the table. The expectation for admission to that table was an open mind, a focus on the whole, not the individual, and a good faith commitment to hear all sides. We had representatives of grazing ownership, eastern and western Oregon timber owners, county forest owners, small woodland owners, tribal forest ownership, conservation focused forest ownership, the Department of Forestry, the Emergency Fire Cost Committee and myself – not only wearing my OFIC hat, but also carrying the voice of the twelve Forest Protective Associations, whose membership spans every sort and type of landowner invested in the success of the complete and coordinated fire protection system.

We began in August and met every two weeks from then until we sit here before you. We agreed on a shared set of principles that every idea was evaluated against. There were brainstorming exercises, and dead ends, and breakthroughs and tough conversations. But with the Senator's leadership we were able to craft what we think is the best option for at least beginning to address our shared affordability challenges for all 16.2 million acres that ODF protects.

I understand there were frustrations from outside of the room about who was at the table, and I appreciate that, but the people who were in the room were there because this was a focused exercise on the budget and the budget alone. Those of us in the room were the ones who pay fire bills to fund the system. I have no doubt that without the safe environment Senator Steiner created to have these conversations we wouldn't have made it this far. This isn't the first time a group has tried to solve this problem, but it's without question the furthest any effort has ever gotten – and I can assure you that success is due to the process, structure, trust and knowledge that Senator Steiner brought to the conversation.

We hope that same dynamic can continue as we move forward with conversations to address this pressing issue.

Kyle Williams, Director of Forest Protection.