

February 12, 2024

House Committee on Revenue

RE: HB 4133

Chair Nathanson and Committee Members,

I'm Les Perkins, Hood River County Commissioner providing testimony in favor of HB 4133. I serve on the Wildfire Funding Working Group representing Counties and have been involved in the process of the development of HB 4133 with Senator Steiner and the other working group members.

Hood River County owns and manages over 34,000 acres of timberland, representing the largest county land ownership in the State of Oregon. We sustainably harvest just under 10 million board feet of timber annually with an average harvest rotation of close to 100 years. The revenue from our timber harvests provides approximately 1/3 of our general fund dollars annually, directly paying for services for Hood River County residents. Additionally, our County forest provides recreation opportunities to our residents and tens of thousands of visitors annually. All of our acreage is open to the public and has an organized trail system for hikers, horseback riders, ATV's, and mountain bikers. We've developed an advisory committee made up of user groups to plan and manage our recreational trail system. This system has become an internationally known amenity, drawing people from around the world to recreate in our County. Needless to say, we value our timberland in many different ways.

Hood River County has had a great working relationship with Oregon Department of Forestry and values the great fire protection provided for our forestland. However, when the funding for SB 762 was shifted to the landowner fire protection fees, our rates jumped nearly 40% between 2023 and 2024 bringing our assessment to over \$250,000 annually. Further compounding our costs, we are assessed at double the rate of private land. We actively manage our forest, with pre-commercial thinning at 20 to 25 years, and commercial thinning between 50 and 60 years to keep our stands healthy and fire resilient. We manage for disease and storm damage and build and maintain a robust road network for firefighting access. We are responsible forest land owners who provide an amazing resource to the public.

We were very happy to have been given a seat at the table to develop a solution to the wildfire funding issue. The goal of the group was to decomplexify the funding, create fee equity, and provide a stable funding platform. We were all asked to be willing to speak frankly and to be creative. We were also asked to recognize that it was unlikely any of us would get everything we wanted.

Senator Steiner did an excellent job of keeping us all on task and working to understand the issues from all perspectives. At the end of the day, none of us got everything we wanted but we

were successful in addressing issues around complexity of funding, equity of fees, and stability in funding. Make no mistake, more work is needed but much progress has been made and a platform for further improvement has been built. This bill gives relief to counties that own timberland and to the residents of those counties who own timberland, as well as certainty that ODF will have the resources necessary to provide protection if and when it is needed.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Les Perkins", with a horizontal line extending to the right.

Les Perkins
Hood River County Commissioner