



February 18, 2024

To: Senate Finance and Revenue Committee
In support of SB 1593-1

Dear Chair Meek, Vice Chair Boquist and Members of the Committee,

My name is Karen Harrington, testifying in strong support of SB 1593-1, Senator Golden's bill to study fair funding for communities at risk of wildfires. This testimony is on behalf of the Climate Reality Project, Portland Chapter. I am the Legislative Committee Chair.

Oregon's landscape is changing. Drought and rising temperatures have resulted in a dramatic increase in the number of and severity of wildfires. At the same time, homes and communities that are at increased risk have fewer resources to fight, prepare for, and recover from these devastating events. Senator Golden's Graph, submitted as testimony on February 20, clearly shows the dramatic decline in revenue from Harvest Taxes in the last 30 years. There has been no replacement, leaving communities with the need to provide more services with less resources. SB 1593-1, if passed, will study how to increase funding in an equitable manner supporting fire preparedness and management, home hardening, and increase revenue to counties hit by these wildfires.

It is unfair for Oregon's rural counties to continue to bear the brunt of the devastation wrought by the increasingly disastrous wildfires. Timber owners, 64% of which are Real Estate Investment Trusts (REITs), make windfall profits while paying approximately 16% of the value of the land as property tax (timber is not valued) and there has been no timber severance tax when the trees are cut for the last 30 plus years. These companies treat our forests as plantations and industrial timber; their goal is to maximize profits, cutting trees on a 35-40 year rotation. This system provides hefty profits at the expense of healthy streams and it results in landslides and runoff.

SB 1593-1 proposes a severance tax on forested lands. It is a graduated tax from one percent for owners of less than 500 acres to six percent for the largest landowners. It also provides a tax incentive to support longer rotations and selective harvesting. This system would enable a natural climate solution, drawing carbon out of the atmosphere to store in forests. The resulting revenue will be divided as follows:

- 50% to fund fire preparedness and fire management
- 40% to counties to fund needed services (unrestricted)
- 10% for watershed management and infrastructure.

The League of Women Voters of Oregon, in their testimony, states that this system is equitable, adequate, stable, easy to administer and simple. We agree. Rough estimates project that a graduated severance tax would bring in \$78 million after the subtraction of the repealed harvest tax revenue.

Climate Reality appreciates your attention to this critically important issue and urges your support of SB 1593-1.

Thank you,

Karen Harrington
Volunteer, Climate Reality Project, Portland Chapter
Legislative Committee, Co-Chair
Volunteer, MCAT

PS If you haven't had the opportunity, we at Climate Reality encourage you to watch Elemental, Reimagine Wildfire at <https://www.elementalfilm.com/>.

About The Climate Reality Project

The Climate Reality Project, Portland Chapter is a local, volunteer-led group affiliated with the international non-profit The Climate Reality Project founded by climate leader and former US Vice President Al Gore, whose mission is to catalyze a global solution to the climate crisis by making urgent action a necessity across every sector of society. With a global movement more than 5 million strong and a grassroots network of trained Climate Reality Leader activists, we're spreading the truth about the climate crisis and building popular support for clean energy solutions. For more information, visit the Portland Chapter at <https://climaterealitypdx.com/>, and the Climate Reality Project at www.climaterealityproject.org.