

Submitter: David Powell  
On Behalf Of: Westminster Woods Camp and Conference Center  
Committee: Senate Committee On Finance and Revenue  
Measure: SB1593

Senator Mark Meek, Chairman

Mr. Chair and Members of the Committee,

My name is David Powell and I am submitting testimony in opposition to SB 1593. I live in Pendleton and have been a resident of Oregon for more than 35 years. I am currently retired, but I actively volunteer for the Westminster Woods Camp & Conference Center, a beautiful, 231-acre forested property near Meacham, Oregon in northeast Oregon's Blue Mountains. The Camp, a nonprofit enterprise, is owned and operated by First Presbyterian Church of Pendleton, Oregon.

Oregon has a strong, and ongoing, need to provide information about forestry activities for the residents of Oregon. The Oregon Forest Resources Institute has long done an excellent job of communicating about forestry issues in a manner that is understandable for the general public. As climate change worsens, the risk of Oregon's forestlands continuing to burn in ever more severe wildfires will only increase with time. Published research looking specifically at eastern Oregon (2026; "Wildfire, climate, and perceptions in northeast Oregon"; Regional Environmental Change, vol. 16, iss. 6, p. 1819-1832) showed that (1) Eastern Oregon has experienced a significant trend of increasing temperatures during the summer months that qualify as fire season (and this trend has been accompanied by more fire activity); (2) "Average monthly June-September temperatures in eastern Oregon have risen over the past century, from a median around 60.1 °F during 1895-1914 to 63.4 °F during 1995-2014, the coolest and warmest 20-year periods on record;" (3) "Recent warming, since 1970, has been accompanied by more frequent wildfires: a statistically significant upward trend averaging 2.3 additional fires per decade;" (4) "The past 20 years include 6 of the 10 warmest in this 120-year record;" and (5) "The June through September warming in eastern Oregon over these 120 years has been steeper than global trends". A National Research Council research report showed that with a 1-degree C (1.8-degree F) increase in mean annual temperature, the Blue Mountains portion of Oregon is predicted to experience up to 6 times as much wildfire burning as compared to the 1950-2003 baseline burn areas.

OFRI is instrumental in producing educational materials to help Oregon residents prepare for a future where wildfire will be much more common, and destructive, than it has been in the past. And the 2020 Labor Day fires in western Oregon showed that this trend will not just affect the dry, flammable forests of eastern Oregon.

Forested properties are used for many purposes, and they provide a pleasant background for everyday life in rural Oregon. We should not take them for granted! I strongly encourage the Legislature to appropriate more funding to assist with fire protection.

In particular, I do NOT support increasing taxes for small forest properties to fund

increased fire protection. I cannot speak to large industrial forestland ownerships, but small woodland owners do a good job, overall, of managing their forest properties. But overwhelmingly, these primarily family-owned and operated properties do not manage their forestland for profit or on a full-time basis; increasing the tax burden of small woodland owners will likely result in forest property being divested and converted to non-forest uses, including development and an increasing amount of wildland-urban interface (WUI). More WUI makes the fire protection job more difficult and cumbersome, and the values at risk (structures, etc.) are much greater too. Again, I oppose passage of SB 1593, and I thank you for your time, and the opportunity to provide this testimony.