



Oregon

Tina Kotek, Governor

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Written testimony for Senate Bill 432

Good Afternoon, Chair Golden, Vice Chair Nash, and Members of the Committee.

My name is Tim Holschbach, and I serve as the Interim Deputy State Forester of the Department of Forestry (ODF).

The department has no position on this bill, and this letter is intended to be purely informational.

Senate Bill 432 would allow the State Forester to use wildfire suppression personnel, equipment, and services to control wildfire on any lands managed by the United States Forester Service, at the discretion of the State Forester. This service would be in addition to the department's current wildfire suppression responsibilities.

The department currently has this permission through the Master Cooperative Wildfire Management and Stafford Act Response Agreement to take "independent action" on fires located on federal lands that are deemed a threat to the department's protection jurisdiction.

ODF's statutory mission is to suppress fires on protected lands that pay into Oregon's wildfire system. Protecting these lands, which includes private and public timber and rangelands, is our primary mission and in all cases will be our priority in responding when fire suppression resources are constrained.

During a typical wildfire season, ODF is frequently requested by our federal partners to respond to fires on federal lands. In doing so, the federal agencies assume financial responsibility and legal liability for ODF's suppression efforts and reimburse us at the end of the fire season. However, when ODF initiates "Independent Action" on federal lands, as this bill proposes, then ODF must assume that financial responsibility.

The state would have to accept the unlimited General Fund exposure that responding to federal fires poses. ODF would also be responsible for any accidents, injuries, and any other liabilities that occur while taking suppression actions.

Thank you,

Tim Holschbach
Interim Deputy State Forester