



COIC



March 3, 2025

Chair Sen. Jeff Golden
Vice-Chair Sen. Todd Nash
Senate Committee on Natural Resources and Wildfire
900 Court St. NE
Salem, OR 97301

RE: SB 82 – Support for Oregon Conservation Corps policy change

Dear Chair Golden and Vice-Chair Nash,

We are pleased to provide testimony on SB 82, specifically related to the policy revision and allocation suggestion for the Oregon Conservation Corps. Originally established in 2021 under SB 762, the Oregon Conservation Corps serves the dual purpose of investing in wildfire resiliency and youth workforce development initiatives in high wildfire-risk communities across Oregon. This innovative initiative has achieved meaningful community protection while training the next generation of wildfire workforce, reaching youth and communities that have traditionally been underserved and/or left behind. SB 82 seeks to amend the original statute to enhance and codify the engagement of OCC programs to the Office of State Fire Marshall. This reflects the value of partnership at the local level in high fire risk communities.

“These efforts towards fire prevention give us a fighting chance to protect structures and prevent injuries during extensive wildfire events. Jefferson County is an economically

challenged area, and this program allows us to treat properties and work with homeowners that simply wouldn't otherwise be able to do this work."

Chief Jeff Blake – Jefferson County Fire and EMS

Since SB 762 was passed, the Higher Education Coordinating Commission organized an Advisory Committee, built a grant process, and has managed dozens of awards to Oregon's leading youth development organizations including Northwest Youth Corps, Heart of Oregon Corps, Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs, Ecostudies Institute, Lomakatsi Restoration Project, Ant Farm, Integral youth Services, Phoenix School of Roseburg, and Community Service Consortium. These organizations partner with the Office of the State Fire Marshall, local fire chiefs, and the Oregon Department of Forestry to ensure the highest priority sites are selected. These targeted small acreage projects often provide the "missing link" to fire agencies' ability to address the highest priority risks within their jurisdiction. And it is working.

"My session as a Community Wildfire Protection Corps member at Northwest Youth Corps opened up a new world of possibilities for me. I had no prior experience on work crews, using chainsaws, or with wildfire preparedness. In just three months I gained the knowledge and confidence needed to move into countless job opportunities in conservation, wildfire management, and outdoor leadership. Additionally, my experiences as a crew member has taught me how to approach complex projects with a team, collaborate implementing a work plan, and be adaptable to many different variables."

- Alicia Rabideau – OCC Alumni 2022

The committed investment the Legislature has made to the OCC since 2021 has garnered attention from across the West, including from philanthropists and foundations ready to follow the state's continued leadership. The OCC has made significant progress on building the workforce needed to help protect Oregon communities that face ever increasing wildfire risk. Since its inception in January 2022, the program has treated a total of 7,406 acres across 1,147 sites, protecting 1,347 structures., and serving 1,079 youth and young adults. Without continued support from the state, the public/private partnerships that drive these outcomes will be put at risk.

The following organizations urge you to support SB 82 and Oregon Conservation Corps:

Antfarm
Central OR Intergovernmental Council
Firefighters United for Safety, Ethics,
and Ecology
Heart of Oregon Corps
Integral Youth Services

League of Oregon Cities
Lomakatsi Restoration Project
Northwest Youth Corps
OCC of Umpqua Valley
Oregon Wild

Thank you for your consideration!