



March 12, 2025

To: Senator Lew Frederick, Co-chair, Joint Committee on Ways and Means Subcommittee on Natural Resources

Representative Emerson Levy, Co-chair, Joint Committee on Ways and Means Subcommittee on Natural Resources

Re: SB 5521 – Dept. of Forestry Budget

American Forest Resource Council (AFRC) is a regional trade association whose purpose is to advocate for sustained yield timber harvests on public timberlands throughout the West to enhance forest health and resistance to fire, insects, and disease. We do this by promoting active management to attain productive public forests, protect adjoining private forests, and assure community stability. We work to improve federal and state laws, regulations, policies and decisions regarding access to and management of public forest lands and protection of all forest lands. AFRC represents over 50 forest product businesses and forest landowners throughout the West. The state of Oregon's forest sector employs approximately 61,000 Oregonians, with AFRC's membership directly and indirectly constituting a large percentage of those jobs. Rural communities are particularly sensitive to the forest product sector in that more than 50% of all manufacturing jobs are in wood manufacturing.

We are writing to express our support for adequate funding of the Federal Forest Restoration (FFR) program to a level that enables the Oregon Department of Forestry (ODF) to assist its federal land management partners to reduce fire risk through active forest management. The FFR program, created to accelerate the pace, scale and quality of forest restoration in Oregon's federal forests, has become an essential component that most National Forests in Oregon rely on for planning and implementing forest health treatments, particularly those that reduce the risk of high intensity wildfire. We also wish to express our support for ODF to receive appropriate hiring authority to adequately leverage funding, including program revenue generated from timber value included in GNA timber sales, from their federal partners.

The U.S. Forest Service has been implementing its 10- year Wildfire Crisis Strategy (WCS) for confronting the wildfire crisis in the West. The primary goal of the WCS is to safeguard communities and the resources they depend on by increasing fuels treatments on federally managed forest land at high risk of catastrophic wildfire. Through the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL), Congress appropriated \$1.4 billion to implement the WCS with investments on 10 landscapes in 8 Western States. With additional funding under the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) of 2022, the Forest Service selected 11 additional landscapes in 69 firesheds for treatment. Three at-risk firesheds affecting three National Forests in Oregon are among these 21 landscapes: the Mt Hood Forest Health and Fire-Resilient Communities (Mt Hood National Forest), Klamath River Basin (Fremont-Winema National Forest), and Central Oregon (Deschutes National Forest).

In the January 2023 publication announcing the 11 additional landscapes, the Forest Service emphasized that they “remain well short of the resources needed to complete all of the work called for in the Wildfire Crisis Strategy.” That one document makes 71 references to the necessity of “partners” in effectively confronting this crisis. The Mt Hood, Fremont-Winema, and Deschutes National Forests each specifically identify ODF as one of those critical partners needed to achieve the goals outlined in the WCS.

The FFR program also has the potential to augment the Forest Service’s ability to conduct environmental analyses to comply with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). Compliance with the NEPA is often a significant barrier to implementing fuels reductions treatments necessary to fulfill the objectives of the WCS. ODF can fill positions to provide NEPA expertise that is crucial to expanding active forest management on federal forest lands.

Positioning ODF to effectively leverage these federal funds requires attention to its staffing needs to align with funding and federal forest restoration needs. This is a critical juncture for the state of Oregon to act on its commitment to partnering with the Forest Service. Failure to do so would likely result in a lost opportunity to expand active forest management on federal forest land in Oregon. Fewer acres at risk of wildfire would be treated and more communities would be at risk in Oregon.

Please take this opportunity to:

- 1.) Fully fund the FFR Program**
- 2.) Support hiring authority to leverage federal funding and program revenue that can augment ODF’s ability to support NEPA compliance needs on federal forest land.**

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Andy Geissler".

Andy Geissler
Federal Timber Program Director
American Forest Resource Council