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Joint Committee on Ways and Means Subcommittee on Natural Resources

Testimony in support of SB 5521, Oregon Department of Forestry Budget

Submitted by Pete Caligiuri, Oregon Forest Strategy Director

Co-Chairs Frederick and Levy and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on Senate Bill 5521, the budget for the Department of Forestry for the 2025-2027 biennium. The Nature Conservancy (TNC) is a science-based, non-partisan organization, with over 80,000 supporters in Oregon alone, committed to conserving the lands and waters on which all life depends. Our staff manage lands and waters in varied ecosystems and partner with ranchers, farmers, fishers, timber, and environmental interests to tackle the most challenging conservation issues facing people and nature.

Our staff is comprised of scientists, conservation practitioners, land stewards, and fire managers based in communities across the state. Our forests, fire, and climate teams focus on the ecology and restoration of Oregon's dry forests, as well as leveraging Oregon's wet forests in the West Cascades and Coast Range for their immense climate mitigation potential. Across this work, we partner with the Oregon Department of Forestry (ODF) as well as local, state, federal, NGO, research, and tribal partners to inform best practices to increase landscape resilience, reduce wildfire risk to communities, sequester and store carbon, and sustain functioning forest ecosystems for the many benefits they provide to nature and people.

Oregon, like much of the Western U.S. is experiencing ever-more intense wildfire seasons, drought, insect outbreaks, and other stressors driven by longer, hotter, and drier summers. As a result, our forests, rangelands, and surrounding communities, are increasingly vulnerable to severe disturbances and associated impacts. It is important we address these challenges through a comprehensive approach that ensures ODF has adequate funding, resources, and capacity to manage and implement programs effectively. TNC supports the state's investment in forest resilience, restoration, wildfire mitigation, and natural climate solutions and urge the agency budget be fully funded at the continuing service level.

In addition, we also recommend you to prioritize the following funding options as you consider the budget for this agency:

Federal Forest Restoration Program (FFRP): The FFRP has a proven track record helping to support forest restoration on federal lands in Oregon and the local stakeholder-driven forest collaboratives that help make this work happen. We request fully funding critical FFRP programs, including the Technical Assistance and Science Support (TASS) grants and the Collaborative Capacity grant program administered by OWEB. Together, FFRP grant programs and staff leverage federal funds to increase the pace and scale of proactive forest restoration and wildfire risk reduction work, deliver direct on-the-

ground forest planning, implementation, and monitoring through Good Neighbor Authority, and support collaborative capacity and science to engage with federal partners on federal land management.

Landscape Resilience Program (LRP): The LRP was established through SB 762 and works to improve forest restoration and resilience, providing grants to fund proactive treatments that reduce wildfire risk on both public and private forestlands. Funding from the first two rounds of the LRP investments went to 14 projects spanning nearly every corner of the state, where the implementation of a range of mechanical thinning, invasive grass removal, and prescribed fire treatments has benefitted both the ecosystems and the communities that depend on them. The program was funded at \$20 million in the 2021-2023 biennium but was reduced by nearly \$8 million in the Governor's Recommended Budget for 2023-2025.

TNC requests the program funding be restored to \$20 million. We recognize that landscape resilience funding is part of the larger discussion around wildfire mitigation funding per recommendations from the Wildfire Funding Working Group, but however the funding is allocated, we urge adequate and sustainable funding for this work. As ODF and other local, state, federal, tribal, and NGO partners work to realize the vision of the 20-year Landscape Resilience Strategy, state investment is critical to sustain implementation that will help us get ahead of the current wildfire crisis we are facing.

Private Forest Accord Development (PFA): Senate Bill 1501 (2022) directed ODF to establish a Small Forestland Owner Investment in Stream Habitat Program (SFISH), the Adaptive Management Program (AMPC), and the Independent Research and Science Team (IRST) as part of the continued implementation of the PFA. The SFISH program is currently funded in the GRB at \$6M, but needs a \$10M investment in order to provide the technical and financial assistance to small forestland owners. The AMPC and IRST are not currently funded in the GRB, but are essential committees tasked with directing and overseeing research to ensure that the PFA meets the biological objectives for covered species under the HCP. The funding need for the AMPC and IRST is \$6M for the biennium. TNC supports fully funding these two core programs of the PFA to make good on the historic agreement between conservation, fishing, and timber interests.

Climate-smart Forestry and Climate Action: TNC supports ODF's commitment to mitigating climate impacts within their forest management and restoration work. HB 3409 (2023) created the Natural and Working Lands (NWL) Fund, which allocated \$10M to four state natural resource agencies (ODA, OWEB, ODFW, ODF), to incorporate natural climate solutions into their missions, programmatic investments, and performance metrics and to work across agencies to identify opportunities to leverage natural climate solutions strategies within their work. ODF received \$3.25M from the NWL Fund to invest in implementation of climate-smart forestry practices for disadvantaged forest owners and Tribal partners and to increase capacity at ODF's Climate-Ready Seed Orchard. We are encouraged by the initial investment from the State into nature-based practices and support ODF's efforts to operationalize their Climate Change and Carbon Plan. We encourage ODF to invest in increasing agency capacity to help to administer these funds and increase adoption of climate-smart forestry practices.

TNC is committed to working with ODF leadership to ensure the agency has the funding, the position authority, and the staff capacity to manage and implement these critical programs. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on ODF's budget and for your thoughtful approach to supporting Oregon's forests.