



**OREGON
WILD**
Let Nature Live. Let Nature Last.

To: Senate Committee on Finance and Revenue

From: Oregon Wild

Date: April 7, 2025

Re: Support SB 1177

We are chronically under-investing in our public infrastructure, and that includes fire prevention and preparedness. It is smart public policy to establish a trust fund for fire prevention and preparedness using a one-time redirect of the Oregon income tax kicker. Oregon Wild, a member of the Wildfire 35 workgroup, supports SB 1177-1.

The scenes of destruction and loss from the 2024 Los Angeles fires were devastating. And yet, we still have families here in Oregon struggling to rebuild their homes and lives four and a half years after the flames were extinguished from the Labor Day 2020 fires. The fierce wind drives wild flames that leap house to house, seeming out of control, immune to our hoses and shovels and helicopters. But, we actually have the power to stop the greatest harm, if we act now.

We know the future that we face: asthma attacks from choking on smoke, rushing home to evacuate our kids and pets, putting our heroic first responders at risk, losing home insurance, and paying bill after past-due bill for wildfires that jumped lines and rushed headlong into communities unprepared for fire. From our experience, we also know that there's another way. There's hope. It is going to take time, money, and maybe the hardest part: changing our ideas about fire, but there's hope.

By now, you've probably seen the formula for massive loss: a dry day where the wind picks up; a power line snaps under the weight of a tossed branch; a spark catches in the grass and the wind drives it higher and faster towards homes. We rush to get our loved ones out on jammed roads ahead of the flames as they storm from home to home. Firefighters rush in but are pushed back by the wind-driven flames jumping home to home. When it cools, there are just so many homes and roads and water systems to rebuild; we ask if there's enough insurance money and how long it will take to rebuild before our kids graduate.

Oregon can do better. We know the most destructive fires move quickly, and we know that equipping fire departments for quick response helps. We know that during wind events fires burn home to home, but that a community of fire-safe homes can break the combustion chain. We know that forests are hardly the culprit in the most

destructive fires. We know what insurance companies want to see: homes ready for fire, homes ready for protection by well-equipped fire fighters who can arrive quickly and work safely.

We also know that in a fast fire, seconds matter. Oregonians need clear orders to evacuate and we need routes to get out and places to go that we can afford. It costs money many of us don't have in order to flee our homes. We also know that a season of wildfire is very bad for our lungs and we have to invest in filters and clean air shelters even while we're investing in homes and response.

While a wildfire in a forest might be good, bad, or neutral, a fire in our neighborhoods is just a disaster. We need to bring in the folks who know disasters to prepare us. We need to be confident in our insurance to cover the costs for us, for our neighbor, for our town.

All of this costs money.

In Oregon, the most costly wildfire season in history is just behind us, but the most costly *disaster* is actually still with us as we struggle to rebuild from the Labor Day 2020 fires. Investing in home preparations, clean air spaces, and local fire departments will prevent the Labor Day 2020 Fire of the future. Investing requires dedicated money over time to prevent disasters, and that requires a permanent, dedicated source of money. We have an investment vehicle that can do that: redirect the already-collected 2026 tax kicker to a permanent wildfire trust fund. Invest the fund with State Treasurer Steiner and invest the earned interest in our communities.

The interest is invested in locals doing effective work to prepare homes for fire, to prevent harmful smoke, to staff-up and equip local fire departments, to prepare evacuation routes, and to reduce the risk that we lose our fire insurance. We invest now because we know it is not a matter of *if* but *when* we stare down the devouring flames. We can do this, together. Oregon Wild urges the committee to support SB 1177-1.

Respectfully,

Casey Kulla
State forest policy coordinator
Oregon Wild