

Submitter:

Malcolm Costello

On Behalf Of:

Committee:

House Committee On Revenue

Measure, Appointment or Topic:

HB3940

Chair Lively, Vice Chairs, and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify.

I am writing to express my strong opposition to HB3940, which proposes a 5-cent surcharge on beverage containers for wildfire prevention and response. More than 50 years on, Oregon's remarkable bottle-bill, including its subsequent amendments continues to stand as a landmark in the kinds of environmental legislation that has kept Oregon such a desirable place to live. It achieves what it sets out to achieve in reducing litter, alongside increasing recycling rates, and ensuring high quality recyclable materials. With the advent of "Bottledrop" it remains a popular environmental program with consumers, with more than 1.1 million Oregonians using it to return money to their pockets, save for college and disability costs, and contribute more than \$5m a year to support their work with communities throughout the state.

I can agree that allocating adequate funding for the purposes of wildfire prevention and response is equally an important environmental measure. The failure here is to arbitrarily tie it to a working program to which it bears little or no relationship – effectively introducing a random sales tax on beverages when there is no direct correlation between the success of the Bottle Bill and the need for additional funding for wildfire response. It feels like a money grab with little regard for the actual causes of wildfires or effective funding solutions. The use of the rainy-day fund, and other funding sources, are also of great concern, as these funds are for other uses.

It's also unclear to me how effectively the bill addresses wildfire prevention rather than just moving parts of the financial burden for rural fire districts from private forest owners to beverage consumers, the bottling industry, craft brewers, and non-profits. Until Skyline Forest and similar are available as public recreation resources I'm not in favor of using public funds to reduce their overhead for no evident public benefit.

I urge you to reject HB3940 and explore more thoughtful and effective approaches to wildfire prevention and its funding mechanisms.