



Subject: Urgent Need to Fund the Forest Collaborative Grants and the Federal Forest Restoration Program

Dear Joint Committee on Ways and Means Co-Chairs: Sen. Lieber, Rep. Sanchez, Sen. Girod, Rep. Gombert, Rep. Smith, and committee members:

I am writing to emphasize the critical need for sustained and increased funding for the Federal Forest Restoration Program (FFRP) and Forest Collaborative Grants (FCG). These programs are foundational for Oregon's forest health, community resilience, recreation/tourism, and rural economies. The positive impacts are evident in the work of the Southern Willamette Forest Collaborative (SWFC) in Oakridge, a direct beneficiary of this funding.

Oregon's vital forests face increasing wildfire threats due to climate change and past management practices. The FFRP provides essential resources for proactive, science-based forest management like thinning and fuels reduction, enhances forest resilience, and is economically sound as it reduces long-term costs from wildfire. Proactive forest restoration reduces costs associated with wildfire suppression, sustains the economic viability of forest-dependent communities, protects critical infrastructure, enhances ecosystem services, and safeguards the natural landscapes that define our state and quality of life.

Forest collaboratives, like the SWFC in Oakridge, foster crucial cooperation among diverse stakeholders to build trust and consensus on complex forest issues. The SWFC has become an indispensable asset to the Oakridge-Westfir community and the surrounding landscape as a direct result of this funding and the collaborative spirit it fosters. Over the past ten years, the multifaceted positive impacts of investing in collaborative forest management have been:

- **Fostering Collaboration:** SWFC collaboration has built trust regarding federal forest issues by convening committees that unite the public, agencies, and stakeholders, developing "zones of agreement" for 150,000 acres of the Willamette National Forest.
- **Strategic Wildfire Preparedness and Fuels Reduction:** Recognizing the heightened wildfire risk in the wildland-urban interface, the SWFC leads the Fire Safe Council, coordinating interagency hazardous fuels treatments and helping the community to be Firewise and Fire Adapted. The SWFC also directly manages fuels reduction on private lands (treating 400 acres) and conducts Firewise assessments and treatments for homeowners (250 assessments, 150 homes treated), increasing property defensibility.
- **Biomass Utilization:** The SWFC helped to launch a local firewood producer and is leading a biomass utilization assessment for the Willamette National Forest.

These additional successes were achieved because of SWFC's collaboration, partnerships and leveraged funding:

- **Community disaster resilience:** By effectively leveraging grants, the SWFC enhances emergency preparedness. For example, the SWFC has secured a \$600,000 grant for a school "multi-purpose room" and leads a funding group to remodeling a community disaster resilience hub.
- **Improved Air Quality Management:** The SWFC collaboratively developed a community response plan to address PM2.5 exposure from smoke, achieving a crucial exemption for a one-hour threshold for PM2.5 during prescribed fire activities.
- **Direct Smoke Mitigation:** During the devastating 2022 Cedar Creek Fire in Oakridge, the SWFC played a critical role in coordinating cleaner air spaces, securing industrial-grade air purifiers for schools, and distributing over 1100 air purifiers to vulnerable members of the public. This large-scale effort by SWFC directly mitigated the health impacts of wildfire smoke.

The SWFC's accomplishments are a testament to the effectiveness of the Forest Collaborative Grants and the broader Federal Forest Restoration Program. These investments are not simply expenditures; they are strategic investments in the long-term health and well-being of Oregonians.

The Southern Willamette Forest Collaborative Steering Committee respectfully and strongly urges you to prioritize robust funding for the Forest Collaborative Grants and the Federal Forest Restoration Program in the upcoming budget and to consider increasing their funding from historic levels to account for the growing urgency of the challenges we face.

Sincerely,



Sarah Altemus-Pope
Executive Director
South Willamette Solutions/ Southern Willamette Forest Collaborative

South Willamette Solutions Directors/ Southern Willamette Forest Collaborative Steering Committee

Sue Cathcart	Willamette Mt. Mercantile (Community member)
David Chamberlain	Career Instructor, University of Oregon (Community member)
Kathy Holston	Previous Oakridge Mayor (Community member)
Craig Marcus	Professor, Oregon State University (Community member)
Susan Obermeyer	Lane Electric Director (Community member)
Laurie Patty	Retired Owner, Postal Pharmacy (Community member)
D'lynn Williams	Previous Westfir Mayor (Community member)
Bryan Cutchen	Oakridge Mayor (Advisory)
Rob Mickey	Middle Fork Ranger District (Advisory)
Dov Weinman	Middle Fork Willamette Watershed Council (Advisory)