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June 18, 2025

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Atten:

Chair: Representative Nancy Nathanson
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Vice-Chair: Representative Jules Walters
Representative Zach Hudson
Representative Bobby Levy
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Representative Greg Smith

Re: HB 3940- request inclusion of funding for Oregon Conservation Corps

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on HB 3940-20, with an urgent request to include funding for the Oregon Conservation Corps.

A bright spot in the infamous SB 762 from 2021 was the establishment of funding and the creation of the Oregon Conservation Corps (OCC), not to be confused with the Oregon Youth Conservation Corps. The Central Oregon Intergovernmental Council (COIC) and Heart of Oregon Corps partnered to form the Central Oregon Wildfire Workforce Partnership (COWWP); a collaborative model allowing us to serve the Central Oregon region.

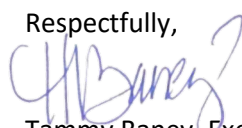
The COWWP connects the Oregon Legislature's desire for reaching at risk youth, creating youth mentorship and workforce development opportunities, and provides crucial wildfire fuels reduction work on properties at high risk of fire. Our youth crews alongside a skilled crew leader, provide free fuels reduction work for property owners, focusing primarily on underserved and low-income communities. This work ranges from thinning, chipping, and ladder fuels reduction in natural areas to create defensible spaces around homes, neighborhoods, and critical infrastructure. Through this program youth gain on the job training, certifications, and knowledge in fire fuels reduction practices.

The success of the COWWP is beyond what we anticipated. Since inception we have engaged 392 at risk youth, who provided over 29,000 hours of service, treated 601 acres, and created defensive space around 235 structures.

Connecting at-risk youth with purpose, support, and job skills training is a win for our region—and for similar programs across Oregon. In a time of limited funding, initiatives like the Oregon Conservation Corps (OCC) are invaluable. With a modest investment, we can link youth who need mentorship and work experience with property owners who recognize the urgent need to reduce wildfire fuels but cannot do so on their own. We urge you to stand with us—and with our youth—to protect our communities from catastrophic wildfire and ensure continued funding for this critical work.

Thank you for your consideration of our request.

Respectfully,



Tammy Baney, Executive Director
Central Oregon Intergovernmental Council