



Oregon

John A. Kitzhaber, MD, Governor

Department of Forestry
State Forester's Office
2600 State Street
Salem, OR 97310
503-945-7200
FAX 503-945-7212
<http://www.odf.state.or.us>

April 8, 2013



"STEWARDSHIP IN FORESTRY"

Representative Brad Witt, Chair
House Agriculture and Natural Resource Committee
Room 347, State Capitol
Salem, Oregon 97310

RE: HB 3109 – Relating to forest wildfires impacts

Dear Chair Witt and members of the committee:

The Department of Forestry appreciates the opportunity to provide testimony regarding House Bill 3109.

Protecting forests from fire is our agency's first priority. The Department protects 16 million acres – just over half of Oregon's forestland base. The lands include privately owned forests, as well as forests owned by the state and by local governments. Through a contract, we also protect the U.S. Bureau of Land Management's forests in western Oregon.

Key to meeting our Department's mission in protecting forests from wildfire is aggressive initial attack. This is all about suppressing fires before they grow large enough to inflict serious damage to natural resources, threaten public safety (public health), or run up millions of dollars in costs for landowners, the General Fund, or both. All of this is why we are interested in HB 3109.

The Department of Forestry had the opportunity to visit with Representative Whisnant yesterday in regards to this bill – specifically the desired outcome being sought. During our meeting with Representative Whisnant a number of amendments were discussed, of which will be the basis of my testimony today.

The bill, with amendments discussed, seeks to increase public awareness of the impact of wildfires – specifically from the 2012 Pole Creek Fire outside of Sisters. Increasing public awareness on the impact of wildfire is something our Department does on a regular basis through education and outreach with the public with an eye towards trying to prevent wildfires. This report would enhance our communication to the public.

We also discussed this report being a joint report, where our agency would work jointly with the Director of the Oregon Health Authority in providing the report. Our Department would focus on the impacts of wildfire on wildlife and aquatic habitat. Our Department, through coordination with other agencies (state and private) could quantify information in regards to acres impacted and miles of stream – riparian areas impacted. Our Department could also provide information

based on previous research like the specific impacts of wildfire on water quality and stream temperature.

The timing of delivery of this report was discussed. Our Department would appreciate having the identified additional time for coordinating and preparing this report in light of our focus right now, preparing for the 2013 fire season.

Lastly, it is understood that this requested report would focus on the 2012 Pole Creek fire, just outside of the town of Sisters, Oregon. While this fire was a United States Forest Service (USFS) fire, our Department was involved from the first day (September 9) through the use of Department air tankers during initial attack. Ultimately, this fire threatened ODF protected lands both to north and east which meant we were there for weeks coordinating and engaging ODF resources to keep the fire off of the lands we protect. This fire grew to 26,795 acres before it was contained in mid October, with impacts from this fire directly impacting the community of Sisters for days.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. I would be happy to address any question you have.

Sincerely,



Paul Bell
Deputy State Forester

c: Doug Decker, State Forester
Richard Whitman, Governor's Natural Resource Advisor
Brett Brownscombe, Policy Advisor, Natural Resources
ODF Executive Team
Doug Grafe, Acting Deputy Chief, Fire Protection Division