

Joint Committee on Ways and Means
Natural Resource Subcommittee
Oregon State Capitol
Room H-170
900 Court Street NE
Salem, Oregon 97301

May 6, 2013 - Hearing

Written Record

Introduction –

My name is Kenneth Cummings

Representing Oregon Forest Land Protection Fund as Chair

I would like to begin my remarks with a cordial reminder of the foundation of our Fire Suppression system;

- 1 – The No. 1 Mission of the State Forester is Fire Suppression
- 2 - Fundamentally we all believe this is a good idea but it also is the law
- 3 - The essence of the Emergency Fund is to provide balance in suppression costs, across protection districts, over time and within the context of this discussion - HB 2050 continues to strengthen our position to fulfill that purpose.

I believe the long term value of HB2050 can be summarized in three different categories:

First,

Economic - As chair of the OFLPF.....

- Part of our fiduciary responsibility to Oregon landowners and the public is to establish rules and incentives for people on the ground to make the best decisions possible and minimize large fires and their associated costs. Prudent financial decision making is enhanced by HB 2050 as it provides for a dollar spent on additional resources up front that could easily be 5 or 10x of that when the smoke clears and the bills come in. Additionally, when our underwriters go out into the market to place our insurance, this kind of forward thinking and action is seen very positively. Probably one of the reasons this fund is one of a kind, in the United States.[3]
- Working [green] forests contribute to the economy for generations vs. burned [dead] ones that only create jobs during one fire season and possibly one year after, because of possible salvage opportunities. Reminder, under Oregon law if there is no salvage / harvest operation conducted a landowner is not required to reforest after a fire. The economic hardship resulting from a catastrophic loss from wildfire may be unrecoverable for many landowners. Unless landowners invests in the land, who knows what the future holds.
- Keeping fires small insulates the GF from huge potential future liabilities e.g. Washington State 2011 - \$35MM GF or in California 2009 - \$900 MM GF.

Second,

Environmental – As a landowner (across all strata - large and small)

- People in the tree growing business have a passion and commitment to what they do. HB 2050 speaks to that commitment because landowners are willing to step up and put money on the table to enhance our ability to suppress fire beyond the current status. They care about the entire forest sector as much as their own lands.

In a recent article from Yale Environment 360 the observation is made that “...intensifying wildfires, coupled with austerity budgets have reduced firefighting capabilities on a global level.” [4] HB2050 helps insure that we here in Oregon will not contribute to this trend.

- Besides being the cheapest dollar anyone could spend to protect the environment and keep forests green [working] this approach keeps valuable resources on the landscape, green trees, shade for streams, cooler water, soil on the hillsides, homes for wildlife, etc.
- Forest fires are the 2nd largest contributor to carbon release in the atmosphere [after decomposition]. From a stewardship point of view, while we can't stop them entirely, we can do our part to greatly minimize the role they play with this bill. [1,2]
- As average temperatures rise and water evaporates more rapidly from vegetation and soil the parallel rise in precipitation needed to offset these changes has not kept pace. Most models predict the deficit will only worsen. [4]

In the Rocky Mountains the duration of individual fires has jumped from one week to five weeks.

In 2012 an estimated 74 MM acres of forest land burned in Russia (2x Oregon's entire timberland base)

British Columbia forests are on the fulcrum to soon emit more carbon than they sequester

As stewards of the land, none of us in Oregon want to contribute to the potential shift of our forests moving from a carbon *sink* to a carbon *source*.

Third,

Everyone - As an individual and Oregonian

- Green forests provide the calm peaceful experience recreational experience people long for whereas burned [dead] forests do not. The sheer peace of mind knowing the two categories already mentioned above are in play contributes to a huge amount of everyone's wellbeing. Green vs. Black may be intangible but it is simply why I love Oregon, why most of us in this room love Oregon and partly why people come here to visit. The choking smoke in Sisters [summer of 2012] did not add to an improved visitor experience.
- When families are still employed and we have working forests means, to some degree, the lessening of the downward spiral of reduced economic wellbeing in rural Oregon, less disruption in family continuity and more than likely less reliance on health and family services and community law enforcement. Even if the combined impact of all of these were minimal, it would at a minimum make already scarce resources more available to areas of higher need.

Concluding Comments

The fact is these three categories outlined above are inexorably linked and the "Long Term Outcome Based Budgeting" concept asks those in various capacities of Oregon's leadership to consider these ideas seriously. HB2050 is an exemplary piece of legislation that embodies this approach to problem solving as outlined by the Governor. The WPA also underscores the transformational thinking coming from the Department of Forestry and its leadership, represented here today.

Thank you for your consideration of HB 2050

Sources

1] Carbon Storage and Oregon's Land-Use Planning Program, 2007 Journal Forestry, Cathcart J., Kline J., Delaney M., Tilton, M.

2] The SAF Climate Change and Carbon Sequestration Task Force produced a report published in the recent issue of the Journal of Forestry titled Forest Management Solutions for Mitigating Climate Change in the United States. 2008. A copy of the report is available online at the SAF website: http://www.safnet.org/jof_cctf.pdf

3] State of Oregon - Risk Management Division, 2013 Fire Fighting Expense Policy – Renewal Submission

4] Fires Burn More Fiercely As Northern Forests Warm, 2013 Yale Environment 360, Walsh, Dylan