

Testimony
2013 Oregon State Legislation Session
House Agriculture and National Resource Committee
Salem, Oregon 28 February 2013

John Breese, family forestland manager and rancher, Prineville, Crook County, Oregon.

I support HB 2050, the Wildfire Protection Act, because it recognizes the unique fire protection issues on the eastside of the state, where most land has lower forest productivity and higher fire risks. The bill addresses the need for the traditional public-private cost of fire protection to focus on keeping fires small, thus saving millions of dollars.

Our land was homesteaded by my family in 1888. My wife and I are 4th generation stewards of this resource. We hope to pass this legacy of well-managed forest and range land to cousins who are eager to take on the challenge of economically managing such land in the high desert.

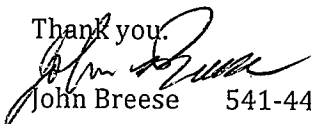
Over 25 years ago, Lynne and I took over management of this important resource. We take the long view, with a vision of what this resource will mean to future generations. Our management philosophy is an intensive on the ground stewardship work-in-progress. In 1996 we were awarded Eastern Oregon Region Non-Industrial Forest Lands Forest Stewardship from ODF & ODFW. In 2010 we were given the Outstanding Achievement Award for Stewardship by the Society for Range Management.

Unfortunately, today The "Eastside forest" can no longer pay its way. Local mills have closed, (five in Prineville alone), log values have dropped, logging costs have increased, and logging infrastructure is collapsing. Increasing fire protection assessments are out-stripping the ability of the land, especially eastside land, to grow trees profitably. Currently, the patrol assessment on our land is over 90% of our property tax. Fire protection costs and large fire loss threats are major concerns in our operation.

HB 2050, is a change for the better. This bill addresses patrol assessments and puts a check on costs while we as landowners could continue to pay our fair share. For us, the real beauty of this bill is beefed-up district and unit capabilities. The department will be able call up heavy, mobile firefighting tools, "severity" capabilities, where needed and as needed. This could save money and resource duplication. The department is focusing on prediction and detection for small fires, with an enhanced ability to attack these fires before they grow large, and prohibitively expensive to control. The public is better served when all forestland, public and private, is adequately protected.

With the ability to stop east-side fires while small, the Department of Forestry could reduce statewide fire fighting costs. Our protection laws aim to have managed forests and logging for future generations for the public good. Oregonians want clean water, clean air, abundant wildlife and pleasing healthy forest landscapes. The public expects our forests to be protected for these social values. House Bill 2050 could allow these values to be realized for future generations of Oregonians.

Thank you.


John Breese 541-447-6762