

HB 2501 testimony 2015

Fire reports may actually convince stakeholders that the damages caused by wildfires are much less than what actually occurs – that it is even minimal.

In fact, Oregonians are often told that wildfires can have benefits that, weighed as a whole, may actually be beneficial to the forest and rangeland environment.

I worked my way through college and professional school fighting wildfires for the USFS.

During that time, our “hot shot” crew helped to suppress more than 50 major wildfires in nine western states.

I have yet to see an out-of-control fire that is beneficial to any environment.

Wildfires have many significant costs that are not currently being reported including:

- 1) The value of timber incinerated, killed or otherwise damaged is not quantified and reported.
- 2) The value of forage incinerated or damaged is not quantified. The forage value is lost during the year of the wildfire and often for at least the next two years as the landscape tries to recover.
- 3) The value of real estate is often dramatically reduced in the aftermath of a wildfire. Pristine acreage becomes ghastly reminders of the holocausts that ARE wildfires.
- 4) The value of lost and damaged livestock is not quantified. Livestock are often killed, but more often sustain burns that result in their deaths. Loss of production is often immense and is ignored.
- 5) The death loss among wildlife, birds and fish is immense during and after wildfires. Animals are often incinerated with the forest and rangeland. Many others are burned too severely to survive. Sediment and ash “runoff” into streams causes severe damage to fish species.
- 6) Likewise, fire caused erosion and ash pollution damages watersheds for decades if not for generations. The prolonged loss of fish and wildlife habitat is enormous.

And finally, the agencies don’t even attempt to estimate the incredible amount of Greenhouse gases emitted by wildfires.

The single greatest hazard, for the Oregon Department of Forestry’s wildfire protection, is the nearly 25,000 miles of contiguous border that it shares with lands managed by the federal government.

Out of control wildfires on federal land often cross those boundaries resulting in massive damage to ODF protected lands.

We believe that the failed federal management of public resources will never be correct, until the people truly understand the magnitude of the cost of the mismanagement that is the direct cause of huge losses to private resources.

HB 2501 represents a start toward providing the public with the information they need to understand the magnitude of those losses.

The bill is NOT written to require, nor is it intended to require, a detailed catalogue of ALL of the damages caused by wildfires.

It IS meant to ask ODF to provide rough estimates of objectively measurable losses caused by wildfires on ODF protected lands.