

Testimony on House Bill 2466, March 28, 2017

Barnhart
Chair ~~XXXX~~, Members of the House Revenue Committee,

My name is Stephen Cafferata and my address is 82166 Lost Valley Lane, Dexter, Oregon 97431. I am a member of the Emergency Fire Cost Committee and I represent the Oregon Small Woodlands Association on this committee. My wife and I are small woodland owners, members of three Forest Protective Associations, and I am a professional forester with over fifty years of forest management experience. I am speaking in opposition to House Bill 2466.

Today I want to bring your attention to Oregon's Complete and Coordinated Fire Protection System. This system, started by private landowners more than 100 years ago, is based on a partnership of private and public forest land owners coming together to protect Oregon's forest land. The system is unique in sharing resources and fire funding. The goal is to share on a 50/50 basis between private landowners and the State of Oregon. No other state has this shared funding.

The fire seasons of 2013, 2014, and 2015 tested this system and refocused attention on how the system functions. In 2016, a major study called the Fire Program Review was conducted, which included members from public and private forest land owners, legislators, and members of the executive branch. There are many recommendations from this Review, but I will focus on only one.

The recommendation I am focusing on is from the Funding Work Group, a sub-committee of the Fire Program Review. It recommended that the ODF, EFCC, and BLM initiate a study examining the equity of BLM contributions to large fire funding compared to large fire costs expended on BLM lands.

This study, the BLM Western Oregon Protection Study, 2006-2015, was completed in February of this year. The study was conducted on fires that met the criteria to access Oregon Forest Land Protection Funds over the ten year period from 2006 through 2015. The study covered an area of private and public land on which the Oregon Department of Forestry has a contract with the BLM to protect the BLM ownership.

During the 2006-2015 period, 3% of the total funds that paid for large fire suppression came from the BLM (\$2.1 million.) Other landowners provided 97% of the total funds (\$79.1 million.) However, 59% of the total funds were expended fighting fires on the BLM lands. 41% of the

total funds were used to suppress large fires on the non BLM lands. Additionally, 22% of the land in this protection contract area is BLM land, yet 56% of the acres burned were BLM.

It is critical to have one protection agency protect these checkerboard lands, both to minimize costs, but even more importantly, to minimize resource loss. The leadership of the Oregon Department of Forestry at every level of Oregon's Complete and Coordinated Fire Protection System has been critical to the success that has been achieved. Comparisons to other states have shown this again and again.

The point I am making is that there is a need for equity in fire funding, but not by increasing the private funding share through additional taxes. We look to the Department of Forestry to work with the BLM to achieve funding equity for large fire suppression on BLM land. Additional private assessments are not what is needed.

Thank you for the opportunity to present this information. I will be happy to answer any questions.

BLM Western Oregon Protection Study – Abstract

The BLM Western Oregon Protection Study was initiated through a recommendation of the 2015-2016 ODF Fire Program Review Committee to focus on the financial impacts and stability of the Oregon Forest Land Protection Fund (OFLPF). Information displayed in this report uses “BLM” to identify revenue, costs and acres exclusive to BLM ownership within the study area. The Fire Program Review recommendations included:

“Recommend ODF, EFCC and BLM initiate a study examining the equity of BLM contributions to large fire funding compared to large fire costs expended on BLM lands and present alternatives for reconciling any identified issues to agency leaders.”

Oregon’s unique and successful wildfire protection system is rooted in its collaborative funding mechanisms to provide for base fire protection, severity resources and large fire suppression costs. This protection system is intended to be responsive and equitable to public and private landowners, and protective of the inherent public values which are impacted by wildfires (clean air and water, fish and wildlife habitat and recreational opportunities.) Funding sources to Oregon Forest Land Protection Fund include assessments and surcharges from those public (including BLM) and private lands protected by ODF. They include acreage assessments, forest products harvest tax, assessments on minimum and improved lots and earned interest from the fund balance. BLM’s participation is connected to OFLPF by virtue of ODF Protection through a service contract.

A complete and coordinated fire suppression system in Oregon is the foundational principle for the most efficient delivery of fire protection services and to limit resource loss, environmental damage and suppression costs across Oregon’s complex landscape of shared boundaries. This is especially applicable in the matrix lands of western Oregon where BLM and private lands are intermixed in a checkerboard ownership pattern. The goal of this study is to inform decision makers on the funding of Oregon’s wildfire protection system to make it as equitable and robust as possible. The data developed by the BLM Protection Study presents its findings as those of “BLM” or combined all “Other” ownerships receiving ODF protection and large fire funding within the Study Area (Appendix 1, Map 1).

