

February 6, 2017

TO: Senator Richard Devlin, Co-Chair, Joint Committee on Ways and Means  
Representative Nancy Nathanson, Co-Chair, Joint Committee on Ways and Means

FROM: Wasco County Forest Collaborative Group

SUBJECT: Full funding for the Oregon Department of Forestry Federal Forest Restoration Program

The Wasco County Forest Collaborative Group is writing to express our strong support for full funding of the Oregon Department of Forestry Federal Forest Restoration Program at \$4.4 million in the 2017-2019 biennium budget. This investment, as demonstrated in the last two biennium, is critical to increasing the pace, scale, and effectiveness of restoration of Oregon's federal forests.

More than 60% of Oregon's forests are managed by the U.S. Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management. These forests provide diverse economic opportunities, clean air and drinking water, critical wildlife habitat, and recreational experiences. However, recent research has suggested that at least 2.5 million acres of federal forestland in Eastern and Southwestern Oregon alone requires active restoration – thinning and prescribed burning – in order to restore forest health. Changes in forest management over recent decades has also resulted in the loss of much of the state's forest products infrastructure and associated jobs. The Federal Forest Restoration Program works to support the development of a sustainable forest products infrastructure that provides living wage jobs in restoration and stewardship of federal forests through collaboration, innovative partnerships, and integration of science into planning and management. The program seeks to enhance fish and wildlife habitat, reduce risk of uncharacteristic wildfire, and produce timber supply for mills and forest products companies. Oregon pioneered the model of forest collaboration that has expanded across the West and we take pride in moving beyond an "us versus them" mentality towards a "triple bottom line" solutions oriented approach.

Forest collaborative groups bring environmentalists, timber industry representatives, local government, state and federal land management agencies, and community members together to find agreement on forest management. Collaboration has led to the development of new projects that meet multiple ecological and economic objectives, increasing the number and size of projects the agencies have been able to implement. The Federal Forest Restoration Program has also facilitated improved relationships between diverse stakeholders and agency partners through investments in collaborative capacity and technical assistance. Elements of the program, including Collaborative Support Grants, provide financial resources and expertise to collaboratives that would otherwise not be available to these community led groups. These resources are essential to support the activities of forest collaboratives and contribute to building strong social agreement for forest restoration.

In the 2015-2017 budget, the legislature invested \$5 million in this unique program and expanded it statewide. That investment paid off and has been leveraged more than 2:1 by the U.S. Forest Service in priority treatment areas across Oregon. As a result, a 16 percent increase in restoration-related jobs and a 14 percent increase in federal timber harvest have occurred across eastern Oregon since the program's inception. In the next biennium we have the opportunity to build upon these successes by incorporating the program in the ODF base budget and developing and implementing the Good Neighbor Authority agreement that Governor Brown recently signed. The increased investment and use of new tools will support additional partnerships between state and federal land managers and enable greater returns and

benefits to the State of Oregon and participating partners.

We appreciate the Department of Forestry's implementation of the Federal Forest Restoration Program over the past two biennium and strongly encourage you to continue to support this groundbreaking effort. Full funding for the Federal Forest Restoration Program at \$4.4 million in the 2017-2019 biennium is integral to improving the health and resilience of our federal forest lands, creating and sustaining restoration and stewardship jobs in rural communities, protecting unique habitat for fish and wildlife, and restoring public lands for the benefit of all Oregonians.

Thank you for supporting this important program.

Respectfully,

On behalf of The Wasco County Forest Collaborative Steering Committee,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "William Noonan". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

William Noonan, Facilitator and Coordinator

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