

Testimony to Ways and Means, Natural Resources Committee
Oregon Department of Forestry Budget April 18, 2017

My name is Lyle Defrees, 11956 Huckleberry Loop, Baker City, Oregon 97814. I am a member of the Northeast Oregon Department of Forestry Budget Committee and a member of the East Oregon Forest Protective Association. I am also a member of the Oregon Small Woodlands Association. Thank you for *this* opportunity that allows me to offer comments on the Oregon Department of Forestry Budget.

I ask the committee to support the 2013 Wildfire Protection Act in which landowners agreed to put \$3,000,000 per year in landowner dollars from the Emergency Fire Fund to assist the Oregon Department of Forestry in firefighting readiness in exchange for \$1,000,000 for eastside landowner fire patrol assessment relief. The \$1,000,000 in eastside landowner relief is missing from the governor's budget. It needs to be part of the ODF budget as outlined in the Wildfire Protection Act. The rationale for this relief in 2013 is even more relevant today.

I ask the committee to reconsider the governor's priority of budgeting \$4,400,000 of lottery monies for the Oregon Department of Forestry federal forest restoration projects while neglecting to fund other important fire and private forest items funded by general funds. It makes no sense to subsidize the federal government 4.4 million dollars then cut essential fire protection and private forest budgets. There must be a way to balance these priorities.

The \$1,000,000 the governor stripped from the general fund budget needs to be put back to protect our private forest resources. The "Eastside forest" does not have the ability to pay the increasing assessment expenses. On average, each five acres of my ranch's timberland has provided one 24 hour day of hunting and other recreation, free of charge, annually for the past 20 years. I believe the public has some responsibility to help with fire protection costs.

It is great that the governor supports the federal forest restoration projects. However, the adequate funding of fire and private forest projects and issues, which the governor's budget has neglected, should be a priority to maintain a sustainable community and help rural Oregon meet its challenges. Thank you for the opportunity to comment.

Testimony to Ways and Means, Natural Resource Committee, April 18, 2017, in response to Oregon Department of Forestry Budget

My name is John Breese. My wife Lynne and I live in Prineville, Crook County, Oregon.

Thank you for the opportunity to express our views of the ODF fire budget. Specifically, we need the one million dollar investment relief to Eastern Oregon fire assessments.

Our family has raised livestock and managed timber on our ranch for over 100 years in Crook County. We have ties to this land and the values of Central Oregon. We want this property to continue as a viable ranch now, and into the next generation of family.

I have been on the Central Oregon District budget committee through the tenure of three Area Directors and five District Foresters. I have been a director for the East Oregon Forest Protection Association for many years and have watched the fire budgets increase at an ever-faster rate; now the rates have skyrocketed. Even after Central Oregon District had a relatively "quiet" fire season, the budget increase is very significant.

We live in the dry side of Oregon. Timber grows slow and burns regularly. Central and Eastern Oregon fire budgets reflect that. There is an imbalance between property taxes and fire protection costs. The rate relief was a part of the Wildfire Protection Act that the landowners saw the need for. Timber in Central Oregon cannot grow fast enough to pay the cost of "**an adequate level of protection**".

This is why the State Legislature added the million dollars to supplement landowners within the protection districts on the Eastside. Private landowners are required to provide an adequate level of protection for their forestland. The State of Oregon mandates a timber supply now and into the future. We need the rate relief to our assessment.

Thank you for your time.

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My name is Jim James. I am the Executive Director of Oregon Small Woodlands Association. Family forest owners own 42% of the Private Forests in Oregon. They rely heavily on the Department of Forestry to protect their forests from fire and to provide them with information about Oregon's Forest Practice Laws, so they can operate in compliance with the FPA. In return family forest owners through a harvest tax and property taxes pay for 50% of the Department's preparation for a normal fire season and shares with the general fund some of the costs associated with excessive fire costs. The partnership between landowners and the department is the key to Oregon's success in keeping fires small and limiting costs and losses. With the August eclipse on everyone's mind, the woods will be crowded with novices to see the eclipse. Most will not understand the high fire danger. 2017 is not the year to back off on fire protection budgets.

Landowners also help fund 40% of the Private Forest Division's costs through a harvest tax. OSWA supports keeping the ODF Fire and Private Forest budgets in tact without the cuts in the governor's budget. The full funding of these programs are important so ODF can meet its obligations to landowners and to the public, protect forests from fire, help keep Oregon's forests protected from insects, diseases, and invasive species, and make sure Oregon's forests operate in compliance with Oregon's Forest Practice Laws. The public is best served when ODF is fully funded.

Eliminating of programs cut in the governor's budget are not in the best interest of Oregon's citizens. The ecological benefits from Oregon's forests enjoyed by every Oregonian, will be put at risk if ODF is not fully funded to do its job, fight fire, and protect the resource. A job I believe they do quite well and will continue to do if adequately funded.

I also question the logic of funding for the forest service restoration programs while slashing programs in fire and private forestry. And question the permanent funding of this effort. There should be a point in time when the Forest Service should be able to stand on its own feet and actually pay the state of Oregon back for its investments in federal forests. OSWA does support the concepts in the federal forest restoration programs, but not at the expense of ODF's other important programs that actually get partially funded by landowner dollars. This is irrational.

I would like to remind the Committee of the commitments laid out in the 2013 Wildfire Protection Act. Forest landowners take an addition \$3,000,000 per year from the landowner's Emergency Fire Fund to enhance ODF's fire preparedness to address wildfires. In return, the general fund is to allocate \$1,000,000 to property tax relief for eastside landowners. The governor reneged on the Wildfire Protection Act by not allocating \$1,000,000 to the eastside relief in this year's budget. OSWA beliefs the rationale for the relief is just as real today as it was in 2013.

Thank you for hearing to my testimony. Please take it into account when finalizing the ODF budget.