



Oregon Association of
Conservation Districts

February 26th, 2019

Joint Ways and Means Subcommittee on Natural Resources
jwmnr.exhibits@oregonlegislature.gov

Re: HB 5019 Oregon Department of Forestry, Additional Funding for Rangeland Fire
Protection Associations

To Co-Chair Taylor, Co-Chair Reardon and members of the Subcommittee on Natural
Resources,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. I am testifying on behalf of the Oregon Association of Conservation Districts to express support for HB 5019 and recommend additional funding for Rangeland Fire Protection Associations (RFPAs). OACD serves and represents Oregon's 45 Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCDs), which implement and assist in voluntary conservation. RFPAs are important partners in protecting sage grouse habitat, which is threatened by invasive species, development, and wildfires. HB 5019, which funds the Oregon Department of Forestry, contains a policy option package with baseline funding for RFPA staffing, administration, coordination, and training. RFPAs have grown significantly and the baseline amount does not meet the need to ensure they receive sufficient training, and personal protective equipment. We encourage amending HB 5019 to **add \$450,000 to ensure the efficacy and safety of Rangeland Fire Protection Associations.**

Among the many conservation goals SWCDs work on with private landowners and state, federal, and nonprofit partners, sage grouse is an exemplar of how the partnership approach to conservation can address pressing natural resource problems while working with and protecting local communities and economies. Wildfire is one of the top three threats to sagebrush habitat, posing a risk to the investments the state and local partners have made in protecting sage grouse. **RFPAs are essential to minimizing the detrimental impacts of wildfires like those that burned more than 856,000 acres and cost the state \$514.6 million last year.**

The Oregon Department of Forestry is but one of several agencies involved in sage grouse conservation, which is achieved primarily through the SageCon partnership. Each has a vital role in the partnership. SageCon has made significant progress since its inception. Approximately **200 landowners have enrolled in agreements focusing on sage grouse**

conservation, working with Districts and other SageCon partners. As an example of one piece that Districts implement, in the 2015-2017 biennium Harney SWCD alone treated 7,000 acres of juniper and brush for sage grouse habitat restoration. The fight isn't over though. **Without continued coordination, fire protection, restoration, and monitoring, the state's prior investments in these efforts, the survival of the greater sage grouse, and the communities protecting the sage grouse could still be at risk.** Oregon's SageCon leads the nation in effective, locally driven conservation that protects livelihoods while protecting natural resources, and strengthens community and resilience in the process.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony HB 5019 and the importance of Rangeland Fire Protection Associations. **We encourage you to pass HB 5019 with an additional \$450,000 for Rangeland Fire Protection Associations**, and to further support SageCon through investments in coordination (HB 5027), local implementation teams, and monitoring to ensure we maintain and build on the progress we've made.

If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Anna Freitas". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Anna" and last name "Freitas" clearly distinguishable.

Anna H. Freitas
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