

February 26, 2019

Senator Kathleen Taylor & Representative Jeff Reardon (Co-chairs)  
Joint Committee on Ways and Means Subcommittee on Natural Resources  
Oregon State Legislature

*Regarding increasing the pace and scale of forest restoration in the Oregon Department of Forestry (ODF) 2019-20 budget.*

Submitted by: Kathleen Brennan-Hunter, Director of Conservation Programs

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I submit this testimony on behalf of The Nature Conservancy to express support **to increase the pace and scale of forest restoration by the Oregon Department of Forestry (ODF) through its 2019-20 budget.**

The Nature Conservancy (TNC) is a global, science-based, non-partisan conservation organization operating in all 50 states in the United States and over 70 countries globally. Our mission is to protect the lands and waters on which all life depends. Since 1961, we have led one of the largest conservation efforts in Oregon. We are proud of our conservation track record in Oregon, which includes helping to protect over 511,000 acres of land, 425 miles of rivers and streams, and marine protected areas and reserves covering 9.7% of territorial sea statewide. We have been able to do so with the help of a dynamic board of trustees representing many businesses and communities, and over 70,000 supporters and members in every county in Oregon.

While several programs in the ODF budget are of importance to The Nature Conservancy, I wish to elaborate on the underlying priorities identified in this testimony.

#### Federal Forest Restoration Program (\$3,000,000)

The Federal Forest Restoration Program (FFRP) is a partnership between ODF, the U.S. Forest Service, and other stakeholders to support forest restoration, reduce wildfire risks and economic opportunity on federal forest lands across Oregon. Presently there are over 4.3M acres of federal forest lands in Oregon that need active management, including mechanical thinning and application of prescribed fire – investments here will help reduce the risk of uncharacteristic wildfire and deliver commercial saw logs to Oregon’s rural communities. The Federal Forest Restoration Program has uniquely positioned Oregon as a national model and builds on the vision set by the [legislature in 2013](#) to support the quality, pace and scale of restoration needed on Oregon forests. Senate Bill 357, passed in the 2015 legislative session, calls for investments up to \$40M as beneficial and commensurate to address the scale of this urgent forest health problem. At a time when the U.S. Forest Service is prioritizing the power

of partnership with state and local stakeholders, as envisioned, through their *Shared Stewardship Initiative*, ODF is well suited to receive and leverage an infusion of additional dollars to benefit Oregon's forest health. Cuts to FFRP, both in terms of direct grants and personnel associated with administering the program, can undermine technical assistance resources, as well as Good Neighbor Authority (GNA) capacity and staffing provided to design, lay out, contract and implement timber management and restoration projects. A decision to scale back on FFRP would be a false choice for Oregon. TNC urges the legislature to fund the FFRP at a minimum of \$3M and maintain this program in strong standing in the 2019-2020 budget.

#### Rangeland Fire Protection Associations (RFPAs) (\$450,000)

RFPAs are an entirely volunteer run operation comprised of ranchers and farmers in remote areas where there is no state, federal, or local fire department. Volunteers organized by local RFPAs provide the first line of defense against wildfires in many areas. The RFPA model is based on "neighbors-helping-neighbors." ODF's continued investment in RFPAs augments collaborations with federal and private entities. TNC recommends an investment in RFPA firefighter training and equipment (including personal protection equipment, radios) and a state match of \$50,000 to leverage federal funds for a State-Federal-RFPA liaison position. In Oregon's sagebrush ecosystem, rangeland fires, and the weeds that invade these landscapes after fires, are the two biggest threats to the Greater Sage-grouse and broadly to rangeland health. RFPAs make a critical difference in combatting these challenges. With additional and improved equipment, training and coordination with the U.S. Bureau of Land Management (BLM), RFPAs have been known to have dramatically improve initial response to fires in recent years.

#### Forest Fire and Forest Resilience Investment Package (\$6,000,000)

We would like to highlight the many unmet needs to cohesively support ODF in delivering the best available wildfire response and mitigation, particularly to at-risk communities. We support investments being proposed to (a) provide necessary funding and staffing for ODF to implement fire protection and preparedness in targeted, at-risk communities and landscapes; (b) fund and implement a new "Community Resiliency and Smoke Impact Mitigation Grant Program" designed to provide assistance to wildfire-affected communities to develop and implement smoke management plans and identify smoke-sensitive populations and develop mitigation measures for affected individuals, among other activities; and (c) invest in undertaking a landscape analysis of wildfire risk and develop mitigation strategies to reduce the risk to priority landscapes and associated communities, with an emphasis on immediate threats to human health and public safety.

I write to request the Oregon Legislature to prioritize increasing the pace and scale of forest restoration at ODF by supporting the above investments. Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully submitted by,

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Director of Conservation Programs