



April 5, 2019

To: Senator Michael Dembrow, Chair, Senate Committee on Environment and Natural Resources

Senator Alan Olsen, Vice-Chair, Senate Committee on Environment and Natural Resources

RE: SB 1031 – Residential Solid Fuel Heating Air Quality Improvement Fund

Chair Dembrow and Vice-Chair Olsen:

Sustainable Northwest supports SB 1031, which would provide critical funding to protect and enhance air quality, generate local jobs, and support community and forest resilience. Many communities in Oregon currently face increased public health risks from woodsmoke and wildfire air pollution. These air toxins contribute to detrimental health effects, including cancer, heart attack, immune system damage, nerve damage, birth defects, respiratory diseases and other health problems. The community of Oakridge exceeds federal particulate standards, while Klamath Falls, Lakeview, Prineville, Medford, La Grande, and Eugene are also at risk of exceeding these standards.

There are many practical solutions to overcome poor air quality and the associated health and financial risks from woodsmoke and wildfire particulates. The City of Oakridge is pursuing a comprehensive woodsmoke mitigation strategy that includes a community firewood program for residents to burn cleaner fuel, a woodstove upgrade program that incentivizes more efficient heating systems, and a robust community education campaign.

Developing these programs have the added benefit of creating new markets for byproducts from forest restoration activities, which are desperately needed to reduce the risk and severity of catastrophic wildfire. Creating value and demand for wood chips and pellets used for heating allows forest restoration activities to scale, decreasing the risk of large wildfire and subsequent wildfire smoke. Work to date has seen a decline in harmful particulates in some communities, but renewed state support for these programs are essential.

Sustainable Northwest supports SB 1031 to provide funding to the Department of Environmental Quality for the Residential Solid Fuel Heating Air Quality Improvement Fund. The Fund supports rural and urban population centers, with the opportunity to scale and replicate successful strategies that reduce both woodsmoke and wildfire air pollution. Heating system upgrades, weatherization, compliance, education, and a community firewood program has been proven to improve air quality, reduce impacts on human health, generate local jobs, create markets from forest restoration activities, and reduce heating costs for low-income residences.

We urge the committee to pass SB 1031 and look forward to working with the legislature and impacted stakeholders in the near future to advance solutions that provide diverse benefits for our health, environment, and economy.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'G. Block', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Greg Block  
President  
Sustainable Northwest