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May 7, 2019

Senate Committee on Environment and Natural Resources

900 Court Street NE

Salem, OR 97301

RE: Updated testimony on HB 2225A – Forest Template Dwellings

Chair Dembrow and Honorable Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on HB 2225A. 1000 Friends is a non-profit organization focusing on land use, sustainable communities, and farm and forest land protection across Oregon, in both rural and urban areas. We previously submitted testimony on the base bill and participated in the multi-stakeholder workgroup that resulted in the adoption of the -5 amendments, now HB-2225A.

For almost 45 years, 1000 Friends of Oregon has been at the forefront of ensuring that Oregon's renowned land use system operates to protect what makes Oregon special, including its 30 million acres of forest land. Oregon's forests benefit Oregon in many ways: they create 61,000 living-wage jobs, steward the standing wealth of our state, store carbon, protect our water supply, and provide habitat for fish and wildlife. HB 2225A protects Oregon's 10 million acres of uninsured privately-owned working forests and the industries they support.

ORS 215.750 (the template dwelling statute) was written with the objective of allowing some forest land owners whose lands are in areas that are already developed and parcelized to be able to construct a nonforest dwelling on their property. However, the statute was not written clearly, resulting in abuse and a proliferation of rural subdivisions in what is otherwise productive timberland.

HB 2225A is the product of a workgroup that came together from opposite ends of the spectrum on this bill and came to agreement on how the statute should be clarified to curb the most egregious abuse and yet still provide a pathway for forest landowners whose lands qualify for a template dwelling in their current configurations. HB 2225a is prospective, so it does not punish property owners who have already moved lot lines in order to qualify for a dwelling. It merely clarifies and modernizes the bill in a way that will create predictability, limits litigation, and has the added benefit of reducing wildfire risk. With approximately 50% of all fire starts in Oregon being human caused, this bill offers a pragmatic hedge against the catastrophic loss to one of the greatest uninsured assets of our state. While the final product does not get at all of the issues we identified initially, it is a good compromise and we urge your support of HB 2225A.

Thank you for your consideration of our comments.

Sincerely,
Russ Hoeflich
Executive Director