



February 4, 2020

Dear Members of the Senate Committee on Wildfire Reduction and Recovery,

The Oregon Prescribed Fire Council is a venue for practitioners, state and federal agencies, academic institutions, tribes, coalitions, and interested individuals to collaboratively promote and conserve the fire adapted natural ecosystems in Oregon and expand the responsible use of prescribed fire. We strongly support the proposed amendments to SB 1514 which directs Oregon Department of Forestry to examine and take action on barriers to prescribed fire in the state.

Fire is an integral part of healthy forest and rangeland ecosystems in many parts of the west. Following a century of fire exclusion, landowners are managing their forests and rangelands to mimic fire's natural role in order to reduce the risk of uncharacteristically severe fire. When it comes to meaningfully reducing the risk of uncharacteristic severe wildfire at scale, thinning, mastication, and grazing alone are not sufficient treatments in the mitigation of hazards associated with wildfire. Deploying healthy fire on a much larger scale is essential to the health of ecosystems across the state and the communities that depend on them. Prescribed fire reduces hazardous fuels and wildfire risk, improves forest and rangeland health, promotes carbon sequestration, maintains culturally important plants and animals for indigenous peoples and tribal communities, and improves wildlife habitat. To conduct a prescribed burn, fire professionals design and implement a plan that considers conditions on the ground, weather, and other important factors.

OPFC supports taking steps to study and develop recommendations on barriers to prescribed fire broadly while also prioritizing two key topics: liability and certification.

Liability is the biggest barrier for private landowners interested in using fire to improve the health of their land in the case of a runaway fire. Many other states have created programs for addressing this issue by pairing a Prescribed Burn Manager Certification program with initiatives that reduce liability for those who are certified and follow appropriate steps for planning and conducting burn.

A statewide Prescribed Burn Manager Certification would create a system for setting training standards and a tool for tracking the credentials of burn professionals across the state. With a certification program in place, the state can be assured that burn managers are aware of the steps they need to take, and the factors they need to consider, for a fire to be carried out safely. Defining these standards, and making them publicly available, will bring clarity to burn managers, landowners, neighbors, and others about what the duty of care means for prescribed burning. This certification program would be a voluntary program, that would allow burn managers the opportunity to build professional credibility and motivate them to enhance their skills and expertise in prescribed burning.

Prescribed fire is essential to the restoration of at-risk landscapes to conditions are not only safer for our communities and firefighters, but also provide important ecological benefits to all Oregonians. Expanding its use to non-federal lands is a missing link in landscape-scale approaches that this amendment would begin to address.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "A. Rau".

Amanda Rau, Oregon Prescribed Fire Council Chair
on behalf of the Board and Steering Committee of the Oregon Prescribed Fire Council
oregonrxfirecouncil@gmail.com