

February 5, 2020

Chair Senator Golden
Senate Committee on Wildfire Reduction and Recovery
State Capitol 900 Court Street NE
Salem, OR 97301

Thank you for your public service and for your continued attention to this important topic. My name is Sam Krop and I work for Cascadia Wildlands, a conservation non-profit.....

On Monday, 19 organizations working on a wide variety of issues – such as climate change mitigation, forest and water conservation, and public health – sent this committee a concise letter highlighting our concerns with the various carbon and wildfire bills being considered right now.

We are especially concerned with the proposal to allocate revenue from the Oregon Greenhouse Gas Initiative to pay for an unprecedented, landscape-scale thinning program across 5.6 million acres – a tenth of Oregon’s land base. We have submitted this letter to the record.

Scientists predict that the coming decades will bring more climate change-driven wildfires in Oregon’s forests, regardless of our efforts to aggressively thin our forests. Therefore, **we strongly recommend that this committee prioritize the adaptation measures laid out in Sections 8-14 of SB 1536 that address land use, defensible space, and building codes** – rather than futile attempts to modify fuel conditions and control fire behavior across the entire landscape.

Climate and wildfire scientists agree that due to climate change, fire seasons will be getting longer and burning more acres a year.

Climate and wildfire scientists agree that large wildfires in Oregon are primarily driven by extreme weather conditions such as high winds, drought, etc – not excessive fuels. Therefore, as climate change brings hotter and drier conditions to portions of our state, we can expect a continued increase in wildfire activity on the landscape.

Data from the Forest Service shows that our efforts to mitigate the occurrences of fire through thinning large areas have largely failed. Currently, government agencies spend millions of dollars logging to reduce fuels, yet less than 1% of thinning projects encounter wildfire each year. Even if the area thinned were increased dramatically (as the Governor’s bill proposes), the probability that a fire will encounter a treated area during the 10-20 years that the thinning treatment is still effective, does not increase markedly. Our forests are vast and fire is unpredictable. **Since we have limited resources and time is of the essence, Cascadia Wildlands and our partner groups strongly urge you to prioritize adaptation measures over fuels reduction efforts.**

I think we can all agree though that there are places that fire does not belong, and that is in our homes and communities. Experts have found that the most effective strategies we have on hand to protect homes & communities from wildfire are to:

- retrofit homes with fire-resistant materials, and require new homes built in fire prone areas to meet certain standards;
- maintain defensible space within 60-100 ft of structures (i.e. the “Home Ignition Zone”);
- and
- limit new development in fire prone areas by modernizing land use regulations that take into consideration fire risks and homeowner safety.

These are the science-backed practices that work. Rather than futilely attempting to control the behavior of extreme weather-driven fires, we are asking that you please focus resources into these community defense measures, not logging in the backcountry.

THIS IS PROBABLY ALL YOU'LL HAVE TIME FOR IN YOUR SPOKEN TESTIMONY.

Thinning in the backcountry is not only ineffective toward preventing wildfire, but it can be destructive. In order to foot the \$4 billion bill that SB1536 proposes for landscape level fuels reduction, we will need to generate revenue from our forests.

What does this look like?

My job is monitoring commercial timber sales. Even since the last time I was here, I have seen another timber sale proposal introduced that proposes fuels reduction and clearcutting at the same time. The so-called “Flat Country” sale in the Willamette Forest, McKenzie river ranger district is proposing thousands of acres of fuels reduction along roads, while at the same time proposing clearcut-style logging (a practice known to increase fire risk) in old forest stands.

Generating revenue in the forest means pulling out big trees. More than just destructive, removing large fire resistant trees opens up the forest canopy, introduces the element of windthrow and allows for the recruitment of more young flammable brush. This undercuts fuels reduction efforts: it actually makes fire hazard worse.

There is such a thing as effective fuels reduction, and that work should be focused in the areas around homes and communities. Logging in the backcountry is simply not how we get to a more fire adapted future.

Finally, expanding the role of the Oregon Department of Forestry in managing federal lands would no doubt result in the over-logging and mismanagement of federal public lands. ODF exists in large part to oversee private industry logging in the state, implementing the weakest standards for industrial logging on the West Coast. ODF faces scrutiny over the gross mismanagement of their budget, inadequate planning on state forests, and lack of transparency as recently outlined in a 4-part series by the Oregonian, Failing Forestry. Put simply, funding ODF

to oversee forest management on millions of acres will come at a tremendous cost to our forest ecosystems and communities that depend on them.

Logging forests in the backcountry is not a viable or responsible path toward mitigating wildfire risk. This is a false solution, and one that clearly benefits the timber industry at the expense of Oregon's communities. An earnest approach to keeping communities safe from fire must start from the home outward. SB1536 should focus on science-backed and time tested adaption measures over ineffective and destructive logging and fire suppression.

Thank you,