

February 8, 2020

Dear Senator,

We are writing to you to comment on the proposed amendment to Senate Bill 1516 and other fire bills (SB 1514, SB 1536.) We are concerned that the proposed amendment is both unworkable, and proposes changes that will detract from Oregon's complete and coordinated fire protection system.

Our names are Wylda and Steve Cafferata. We are small woodland owners with land in Lane, Benton, and Lincoln Counties. In addition, Steve is a professional forester with more than 50 years of experience with many roles in fire protection from fire-fighting to policy. He has served as Chair of the Eastern and Western Lane Fire Protection Association Boards, coordinated and fought fires, and worked at many protection jobs. Currently he serves on the Emergency Fire Cost Committee for the Oregon Forest Land Protection Fund.

We are familiar with the Governor's Council on Wildfire Response and have read the complete report. We appreciate this broad effort and believe that many of the recommendations would improve fire protection in Oregon.

We think it is vital that our legislature understand that our Oregon Department of Forestry manages one of the best fire-fighting systems in the country already. Although it is complex, it works smoothly as a complete and coordinated system. It relies on shared funding, local landowner in-put through local Districts, and local land-owner assistance. It has been well-tested over the past 100 years. In our current system, each fire district sets its own budget with input from landowners, and these budgets are approved by the Board of Forestry. This process works well because each district is in the best position to know what is needed for their local area. There are large differences among districts. The current fire funding formula has been developed over many years and is well-proven. We believe changing this formula should be considered only if well-informed input from all involved, and particularly from both large and small private landowners, indicates a need.

Amendment 1 to Senate Bill 1516 not only changes the fundamental funding formula for fire resources, but also moves the responsibility for determining the necessary level of protection on the Districts to Salem and away from the Districts. Again, it is the local areas that are best-suited to determine local needs.

Additionally, Amendment 1 changes the role of the Oregon Forest Land Protection Fund from its current role of funding the land-owner portion of the extra costs associated with large fires to actually funding ODF employees. Currently funding ODF employees is a District function. There are many issues with such a change. It would require changes to the statutes that govern management of the OFLPF. In its current form, the fund has served Oregon well and is an integral part of our complete and coordinated system. We do not support such a change.

We do support increased funding for the Oregon Department of Forestry to enhance its fire-fighting capability and ability to manage multiple large fires in difficult fire years. This increase in funding should be done fairly and through enhancements to the current, proven system, not by changing the function of one element without consideration of the impacts on other parts of the system.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment. If we can help in any way with your deliberations, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Steve and Wylda Cafferata
82166 Lost Valley Lane
Dexter, OR 97431
541-797-9734

