

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

Thank you for your time and ongoing work on this important issue. I am writing as a representative of Cascadia Wildlands, a conservation organization representing over 10,000 members across the region. We appreciate the efforts this committee has made to meaningfully address wildfire safety in the coming years and simultaneously ensure the protection of public lands and watersheds.

SB 1514 contains many excellent sideboards for ensuring that fuels reduction logging projects do not occur on protected lands such as inventoried roadless areas. In addition to these sideboards, to ensure that mitigation efforts are most effective, this bill should also include clearer language prioritizing mitigation projects near homes and communities, not in the backcountry.

Science-backed studies have clearly shown that logging is not effective toward reducing the occurrences of severe wildfire. According to Forest Service data, only 1% of forest thinned in the name of wildfire prevention ever encounter a wildfire during the 10-20 years that a fuels treatment is effective. Climate and weather patterns are the primary drivers of wildfire, not woody fuels in forests. Given this, wildfire mitigation efforts must focus on forested areas near homes and communities in the wildland urban interface, not logging forests deep in the backcountry.

Additionally, SB 1514 should prioritize focusing thinning efforts in young, even-aged stands instead of supporting fuels reduction logging projects in older, native forests. Many commercial fuels reduction logging projects are highly destructive for native healthy forests. Unfortunately, the most economically valuable trees are generally the largest, oldest, most fire-resistant and ecologically important, which means economic motivations are incompatible with an effective fuels reduction priority. In order to generate revenue from the forest, many logging projects actually undercut fire safety by removing large fire-resistant trees, opening up the forest canopy, and recruiting young flammable undergrowth. This process is not only harmful to forest ecosystems, but in many cases it makes fire conditions more severe.

We recognize that science-based fuels reduction projects in priority areas directly adjacent to homes and communities – along with prescribed burning in ecologically appropriate settings – can help reduce fire risk under certain conditions. However, timber interests often conflate these types of treatments with commercial-scale logging in backcountry areas. Please consider amending the language of SB1514 to ensure that mitigation efforts are focused on thinning near homes and communities, not logging old forest in the backcountry.