

February 10, 2020

Senate Committee on Wildfire Reduction and Recovery

Testimony in Support of SB 1514-3

Submitted by: Amelia Porterfield, Senior Policy Advisor

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Chair Golden and Members of the Committee:

For the record, my name is Amelia Porterfield, Senior Policy Advisor with The Nature Conservancy in Oregon. I am here today in support of SB 1514 with the -3 amendments. Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

The Nature Conservancy (TNC) is a global, science-based, non-partisan organization committed to conserving the lands and waters on which all life depends. In Oregon, TNC has more than 80,000 supporters, members in every county, and manages lands and waters across the state.

TNC was an active participant on the Governor's Wildfire Council through two of our trustees; and on the Mitigation Subcommittee through my colleague, Mark Stern, who heads our forest conservation program. We know that wildfire affects all Oregonians - from the impact to our state's financial resources and implications to local economies, to the air we breathe and the water we drink.

But we also know that fire must part of the solution. The exclusion of fire over the past century, while well-intentioned, has adversely impacted ecosystems to the detriment of the plants, animals, and people that depend on them. We must now address this challenge through shared-stewardship, shared-investment, and science-based restoration. Empirical, modeled, and anecdotal evidence suggests that the combination of mechanical thinning and reintroduction of fire (either managed wildfire under low-intensity conditions or prescribed fire) significantly reduces fire intensity, severity, and effects in western conifer forests. Oregon needs to take proactive steps now to ensure healthy, resilient ecosystems and livable communities for generations to come.

Working collaboratively with federal, tribal, state and other partners, The Nature Conservancy is helping to restore dry, fire-prone forests and rangelands across the state. Approximately 5.6 million acres are in dire need of ecological restoration in our fire-adapted forests and sage-steppe rangelands.

Across, southern, central, and eastern Oregon, we deploy science, community engagement and innovation to increase the quality, pace, and scale of restoration in these fire-dependent ecosystems. This work is grounded in ecologically-based restoration efforts to help ensure the future health of these lands and support improved community safety, local economic resilience,

recreation, clean water, and plant and wildlife habitat. Ongoing collaborative landscape restoration efforts across Oregon which provide a roadmap forward:

- The Ashland Forest Resilience Project, a ten-year stewardship effort, is working to reduce the risk of severe wildfire on 7,600 acres, helping to protect water quality, old forests, wildlife, people, property and quality of life. This investment has helped launch the Rogue Basin Cohesive Forest Restoration Strategy by the Southern Oregon Forest Restoration Collaborative focused on 1.1 million acres of strategic thinning and prescribed burning over the next 20 years.
- In Central Oregon, the Deschutes Collaborative Forest Project has completed more than 100,000 acres of forest thinning, mechanical fuels reduction, and prescribed fire over the past 9 years, much of it strategically located around the communities of Sisters, Bend, and Sunriver to restore healthy forests, reduce wildfire risk, and improve habitat.

SB 1514 offers an opportunity to increase the quality, pace and scale of these types of forest and rangeland restoration efforts.

We appreciate the Wildfire Council's work and the Committee's leadership in introducing this important legislation. Passing SB 1514 with the -3 amendment will support ecological forest and rangeland restoration in strategic, high-priority landscapes, help make our cherished Oregon ecosystems healthier and more resilient, and our communities safer in the face of future wildfires, and we urge you to vote to move it forward this session.

Thank you.