

To the Joint Committee on the Third Special Session of 2020,

I am writing on behalf of Oregon Wild and our thousands of members and supporters across the state. Thank you for accepting testimony in advance of the special session on Monday.

We understand that the Legislature will consider moving \$600 million to the state's emergency fund with \$100 million to be used for the state's "wildfire response and recovery" activities.

This could be good news for families and communities trying to rebuild their lives and infrastructure after this year's devastating fires, but it is currently unclear what all these funds will be used for. We hope that the Legislature will prioritize much needed recovery for communities that are rebuilding from this year's fires or need to prepare for future fires.

Over the past two years, the Governor's Council on Wildfire Response and the Oregon Senate Committee on Wildfire Prevention and Recovery worked on wide-ranging policy recommendations and bills. Some of the proposals were encouraging – such as programs to enhance the resilience of homes and communities to future wildfires, making homes more fire resistant, addressing land use planning, and creating fire-wise buffers around communities. Other proposals called for spending billions of dollars to thin and log public forests far from communities and continue aggressive fire suppression - approaches that are expensive, ineffective at protecting homes and communities from wildfire, and can be ecologically damaging. These latter types of wildfire "response" activities should take a back seat to the more needed adaptation and preparation measures that are proven to work.

Funds for wildfire recovery should be based on the work of the Wildfire Recovery Council and focused on things like updating safety and communications infrastructure, utility fire preparedness planning and investment, creating defensible spaces around homes, recovery grants for schools and community services, affordable housing preservation and expansion, and help for people who need to relocate after the fires. Recovery funds could also be used to restore recreation infrastructure, protect drinking water sources, and clean up toxic waste. Efforts to respond, rebuild, and prepare for wildfires must also prioritize the most vulnerable community members -- low income, rural, and communities of color.

Please find attached a letter from several community organizations sent back in November that describes in more detail some wildfire policies to prioritize and those that should be avoided.

Sincerely,

Sean Stevens

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Sean Stevens

Executive Director

(he/him/his pronouns)

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Protecting and restoring Oregon's wildlands, wildlife, and waters as an enduring legacy for future generations since 1974.

November 2, 2020

Dear Oregon lawmakers,

As the fires that devastated western Oregon communities smolder to an end, and as you and other Oregon lawmakers consider how to spend funds and direct agencies to respond to these tragic events, we urge you to support measures that will make the most difference to prepare our state and our communities for a future with more frequent, climate-driven fires.

The government response to the tragic losses of entire towns, thousands of homes, and too many lives in our beloved state must focus on supporting community resiliency first and foremost. A focus on attempting to control the behavior of extreme, weather-driven wildfires miles from homes will fail to keep communities safe.

To this end, we urge you to support the adaptation measures recommended by the Governor's Council on Wildfire Response, released in late 2019. Many of these measures recommended by the Wildfire Council are consistent with what leading experts have found are the most effective strategies to protect and prepare homes and communities. These include:

- Retrofitting homes with fire-resistant materials.
- Requiring new homes built in fire prone areas to meet fire-safe standards.
- Maintaining defensible space within 60-100 ft of structures.
- Creating smoke shelters and other resources that support our most vulnerable community members in wildfire seasons to come.
- Limiting new development in fire-prone areas by modernizing land use regulations that take into consideration fire risks and homeowner safety.

In contrast, other portions of the Wildfire Council's report recommended doubling-down on many of the failed approaches of the past: industrial logging that removes fire resistant old trees and replaces them with more flammable plantations, and aggressive wildland firefighting far from communities that need protection. Wildfire scientists have been telling us for decades that many of the most dangerous fires in the American West are primarily driven by extreme weather conditions - something we saw play out in the east-winds Labor Day fires. Strategic fuels reduction projects in certain forest types — such as prescribed fire and non-commercial thinning of small trees adjacent to communities — can help reduce fuels and fire risk under certain conditions. However, top forest scientists have found that thinning forests far from homes does nothing to protect at-risk homes and communities from wildfire.

Currently, state and federal agencies spend millions of dollars logging the landscape in the hope that they can reduce the severity of a wildfire if it burns through the logged forest; however, thinning treatments rarely influence fire since fires are not predictable and more driven by weather than fuels. Maps of this past month's fires also make clear that logging did nothing to stop the spread of fires - in the Holiday Farm Fire perimeter over 75% of the land had been previously logged.

Earlier this year, in the short 2020 legislative session, the Oregon Senate Committee on Wildfire Prevention and Recovery crafted legislation based on recommendations from the Governor's Wildfire Council. Unfortunately, a number of the proposals that advanced before the session ended focused in this latter category — proposing to spend billions of dollars to thin and log public forests far from communities and continue aggressive fire suppression — approaches that are expensive, ineffective at protecting homes and communities, and can be ecologically damaging.

As you consider how best to help Oregon communities recover from this year's fires, and knowing that there is limited funding, we urge you to prioritize the science-based strategies that are proven to protect people and property from wildfire risks and help them be prepared for future fires. It is time to support better planning and emergency responses, and to direct funding where it makes the most difference — hardening homes and creating defensible space, prescribed fire, and better emergency planning and response. It is particularly important that resources are shared equitably, and that low income families and people of color are not forgotten, such as in communities impacted by the Alameda Fire.

This issue hits home for many of us — we were evacuated, our families and friends lost homes, our offices burned down, or some of our favorite places burned. We want to talk with you about the impact of these fires on communities throughout the West Coast and connect you to those at the frontlines of this struggle. In an era of climate change and more extreme weather, these won't be the last fires in the West, but with your leadership, we can prepare and adapt to ensure that all communities are more resilient when the next ones come. We look forward to working with you in the days and months ahead.

Thank you for your service and for your hard work during this stressful time.

Sincerely,

Patricia Hine, 350 Eugene

Rob Nosse, 350 Portland

Brenna Bell, Bark

Lisa Arkin, Beyond Toxics

Danny Noonan, Breach Collective

Dylan Plummer, Cascadia Wildlands

Barbara Smith Warner, Environmental Caucus of the Democratic Party of Oregon

Timothy Ingalsbee, Firefighters United for Safety, Ethics, and Ecology (FUSEE)

Cristina Hubbard, Forest Web

Susie Schmidt, Great Old Broads for Wilderness Rogue Valley

Lara Jones, Oregon Chapter Sierra Club

Daniel Frye, OLCV Metro Climate Action Team

Lluvia Merello, Oregon Physicians for Social Responsibility

Steve Pedery, Oregon Wild

Greg Haller, Pacific Rivers

Nicholas Tippins, Sunrise Eugene

Angela Jensen & Kasey Hovik, Umpqua Watersheds

Cheryl Bruner, Williams Community Forest Project

Dominick DellaSalla, Wild Heritage