



March 15, 2021

To Senate Committee on Natural Resources and Wildlife Recovery

From: Oregon Association of Conservation Districts

Re: Support with Recommended Amendments for SB 248-1 and SB 287– Wildfire

Chair Golden and Committee Members,

The Oregon Association of Conservation Districts (OACD) represents Oregon's 45 Soil and Water Conservation Districts, special districts governed by elected boards. The Districts protect and enhance soil quality, water quality and quantity, and habitat by supporting voluntary conservation in partnership with private landowners and managers as well as federal, state, and nonprofit partners.

OACD supports the broad effort to address wildfire issues through SB 248-1 and SB 287 which are hearing public testimony together. In general, we believe that SB 248 is the stronger of the two bills. While the major elements of both bills are important, we believe that SB 248 has a stronger focus on getting projects implemented in the field with less administration.

Statewide Map of Wildfire Risk

Both SB 248-1 (Section 7) and SB 287 (Section 8) call for preparation of a statewide map of wildfire risk. OACD agrees that such maps may be helpful. However, neither bill clearly states that the risks need to take into account our high-quality natural resources such as oak woodlands and riparian corridors. We recommend inserting language akin to the following:

The map shall take into consideration the risks to human life, structures and infrastructure, and natural resources.

Defensible Space

Both SB 248-1 (Sections 8-10) and SB 287 (Sections 9-11) address defensible space in similar manners. OACD agrees with the need for improving defensible space. However, we are concerned that it will be difficult to develop requirements that account for protection of natural resources and take into account the site-specific conditions of each property and the benefits of the natural resources. We recommend inserting language akin to the following:

The requirements for defensible space shall have flexibility to account for preservation of important natural resources.

Small Tract Forestland Incentive

SB 287 (Section 26) provides the for small tract forestland owners to get a property tax reduction in exchange for restoring forest health. SB 248-1 has no similar provision. OACD agrees that we need to help small tract forestland owners financially, however, this amount of help in SB 287 is much too small. As written, to get a 1-year reduction in property taxes, the landowners must prepare a plan for the work and get it approved by the State. In many cases the savings in taxes may not even be enough to cover the costs of preparing the plan and getting it approved and will contribute an insignificant amount to the costs of actually performing the work. To make this worthwhile the tax incentive should remain in effect for at least 10 years after the work is done. After all, most forest health work has a useful life of more than 10 years.

Resiliency Goal

Both SB 287 (Section 28) and SB 248-1 (Sections 24) declare a policy of the State to maximize forest resiliency. This is a good policy but should be modified to include carbon sequestration. Suggested language is as follows:

It is the policy of this state to maximize forest resiliency, including, but not limited to, the achievement of ecological goals including carbon sequestration

Reduction of Wildfire Danger

SB 248-1 (Sections 18-20) calls for an on-the-ground implementation effort through the year 2023. SB 287 does not have a similar strong commitment to getting work done in the field. OACD supports these provisions of SB 248-1 which are essential to managing our wildfire potential.

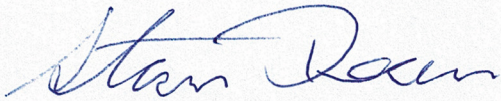
Certified Burn Manager Program (248, 21-24)

SB 248-01 (Section 24) Gives a strong boost to the Certified Burn Manager Program. SB 287 does not have a similar provision. OACD supports this program because it improves the ability to conduct prescribed burns, an important tool in managing wildfire. Prescribed burning helps to reduce fuel loads in a safe manner. Because the temperatures associated with prescribed burning are kept moderate, there are important benefits to preservation of our natural resources.

Appropriations

SB 248-1 (Sections 39-41) makes a deliberate attempt to appropriate funding, specifically \$20,000,000 to implement the bill plus unspecified amounts for developing the risk map and for the Certified Burn Manager Program. While OACD is not saying that \$20M is or is not the right amount, it is a substantial investment, and we know that substantial dollars need to be committed to our wildfire efforts.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide input into your decision-making process.



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