



**Testimony Before the House Committee on Agriculture and Natural Resources
Relating to HB 2722**

March 23, 2021

Submitted by Jim McCauley, Legislative Director - League of Oregon Cities

Chair Witt, Vice-Chairs Breeze-Iverson and Hudson, members of the Committee, for the record my name is Jim McCauley. I am the Legislative Director with the League of Oregon Cities. At the League, our membership base runs the full array of cities from the smallest communities to the largest city, Portland. 2/3 of our membership are cities less than 5,000 in population.

My role today is to introduce this committee to a coalition of interests that have been working on a response to wildfire policy in advance of this session, but for many of us the work goes back years if not decades.

What is important to recognize is the diversity represented. In addition to LOC, the Association of Oregon Counties, Oregon Farm Bureau, Oregon Home Builders Association, Oregon Wheat, Oregon Forest Industries Council, Oregon Cattlemen's Association, Associated Oregon Loggers, Oregon Small Woodlands Association, Eastern Oregon Counties Association, and Oregon Property Owners Association.

The diversity of this interest should signal the range of perspectives we collectively represent when framing our preference for a wildfire legislative template.

We are here as a group, because all of us understand that wildfire policy is critical for our collective ability to find a solution that makes sense, has adaptability at the local level, is an appropriate response to the wildfire risk, and ultimately can be implemented and championed by all interests.

The core principals of our approach are about:

- Setting up a structure that allows for a regional approach and not a state-wide blanket. The regional approach is needed to address the differences from one end of the state to another. Defensible space for example will need to be different in southern Oregon than for the north coast or central Oregon.
- We will need a thoughtful approach that provides for a level of ownership at the local level for the decision making and a sense for community involvement.
- We will also need to make sure what ever policy is adopted by the legislature it can be implemented. The last thing the League wants to be part of is advancing a policy that can't be implemented, so additional resources will be needed for implementation.

I've included an attachment in my comments that represents the coalition members and is a deeper dive into the other elements we are trying to address. These items cover the following:

Strengthen Mitigation & Resiliency Efforts:

From the League's perspective the priority for demonstrating how risk can be reduced should be in the urban setting. There are literally 1,000 of acres of forestland that have been a part of one collaborative project or another and I'm confident professional land managers understand how to use all elements in a toolbox, which include prescribed fire and mechanical treating reduce wildfire risk across the landscape.

Gather Experts to Assess Current Systems:

Need to make sure that the agencies who are part of this process will have the expertise to carry out the intended results. For example, the mapping process outlined in SB 248 includes a collaborative effort with ODF and OSU. There is also a need for a collection of interests to be brought together as part of the decision-making process. The formation of a policy committee that represents a range of interests will be a helpful Land Use and Wildfire Policy Committee.

Enhance Rural Fire Protection:

Oregon's rural communities and landowners require an update to statutory language to have the opportunity to partner with Rangeland Protection Associations (RPA's).

Structural Codes:

Instead of overhauling our current system, DCBS should establish an on-line, research-based interactive mapping tool to mitigate the effects of wildfire for the construction of residential structures.

Fire Fighting Investments:

Recent fire seasons have shown an increased threat to communities and infrastructure throughout Oregon.

Fight Fire, Not the Feds:

Oregon should be able to mobilize suppression equipment and personnel to control fires that are burning within the borders of this state, even if the fire is located on federal lands.

Prepare Oregonians for Future Fire Seasons:

The State should administer a community risk reduction program with an emphasis on education to prepare all communities for future wildfire seasons and emergency situations.

We have time to put together policy that can be implemented and provides reduced wildfire risk in our communities across the landscape.

We must make sure the process established in legislation gets it right. Cities need a policy and a process that can be implemented so we can make sure we can effectively implement standards while achieving community support.