

April 7, 2021

Dear members of the committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in advance of the April 8th hearing on SB 762, "Relating to wildfire." As we are still recovering from recent wildfire events, we are encouraged that the Senate Committee on Wildfire Prevention and Recovery is reviewing proposals to mitigate such events in the future. We are especially encouraged that SB 762 addresses wildfire hazard mitigating building codes, establishing defensible spaces, emergency response and recovery, and even a strategy for mitigating the detrimental health effects from smoke. These are all positive and necessary steps that need to be implemented- particularly for our most vulnerable communities.

However, we take issue with section 18. Here, it appears that the strategy for mitigating wildfires in our forests remains the ever-unsuccessful act of commercial thinning. Indeed, at the March 15th hearing for SB 248-1 and SB 287, it was suggested by Dylan Kruse that an area equivalent to ¼ of all of Oregon should be prioritized for fuel treatment. This treatment, according to Kruse would include broad-scale thinning and extracting large quantities of timber.

This is simply unacceptable. First, such a broad spectrum thinning and logging strategy as a means of mitigating wildfires fails to address the root of the problem and, in fact, exacerbates it. Nothing in this proposal accounts for the carbon emissions that would result from this plan. But current science provides that extracting large quantities of timber and implementing commercial thinning operations conflicts with carbon sequestration goals and greatly increase carbon emissions. At a time when our wildfire events are driven by climate change, our goals must include mitigating the cause of the problem by prioritizing carbon sequestration and reducing emissions.

Second, the proposal to use commercial thinning and logging as a means of wildfire mitigation makes no sense financially. It is estimated that treating around 7000 acres would cost more than 3 million dollars. As ODF has only 4 million to award to wildfire mitigation projects, it seems absurd to waste the majority of that budget on thinning projects that 1) do not address the underlying problem, 2) works to exacerbate the problem in the long term, and 3) ignores more meaningful and efficient ways to realize community protection and preparedness like hardening of homes, creating buffers around communities, and beefing up building codes to include, among other things, fire-resistant roofing.

Logging and commercial thinning are not the answer as the use of these operations historically are greatly responsible for our forests' current lack of resilience to wildfires. Thus, we implore the committee to shift its focus to community resilience and preparedness as this strategy makes the most sense economically and for the environment.

Thank you for your time,

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