



www.RogueClimate.org || PO Box 1980, Phoenix, OR 97535 || 541-301-9204

April 9, 2021

Dear Chair Golden, Vice-Chair Heard, and members of the committee,

Rogue Climate is a climate justice organization with offices in Phoenix and Coos Bay, Oregon with a mission to empower Southern Oregon and South Coast communities most impacted by climate change, including low-income, rural, youth, seniors, and communities of color, to win climate justice by organizing for clean energy, sustainable jobs, and a healthy environment.

We are supportive of continuing to take comprehensive steps forward to protect people, the environment, and structures from wildfire risk to better align with the urgency of the climate crisis, as well as, increase Oregon communities' ability to recover from the impacts of wildfires.

The devastating 2020 Labor Day fires hit Southern Oregon communities hard, especially low-income families, and our Latinx and Indigenous neighbors. 7 months after the fires, these communities are still recuperating with no clear path to recovery. Though we cannot change the past, we can better prepare for the future to ensure wildfire recovery includes not only the environment but also those who call it home.

When the Almeda Fire started outside of the City of Ashland, a majority of people who had to evacuate did not know the fire was on its way to their doorstep. SB 762 directs the Office of Emergency Management to update its statewide emergency plan as necessary to prepare for or respond to wildfire emergencies on an area-wide or statewide basis. **We recommend** that local and statewide emergency response systems are updated to be multilingual for evacuation alerts and emergency communications and updates. Emergency alert systems should include a range of communications channels including landlines and cell phones, in addition alerts via radio and social media. As the state is upgrading emergency alert systems, there should be outreach to community based organizations to ensure that wildfire emergency alert systems are culturally competent, and that no one is left out of getting critical emergency updates.

SB 762 creates health systems for smoke that would allow the Environmental Quality Commission to implement a program to mitigate the environmental and public health impacts



www.RogueClimate.org || PO Box 1980, Phoenix, OR 97535 || 541-301-9204

of wildfire smoke and directs the Oregon Health Authority to establish and implement a clean air shelter grant program with the Office of Emergency Management as lead. A clean air shelter would have been incredibly helpful for fire survivors and community members who did not have a safe haven or electricity during the hazardous smoke in the aftermath of the Almeda Fires. A clean air shelter could also be a place for community members to access charging for phones and other devices in the case of a power shut off or power disruption in the aftermath of a fire. **Another consideration that our communities are facing** is the toxic air quality that is created when the clean-up of burned structures is occurring. Grants for clean air shelters should be prioritized for environmental justice communities.

As some fire survivors find housing, others are rebuilding their homes from the ashes up. We are excited to see SB 762 has wildfire hazard mitigation building code standards for new construction, it is important that we are building back in anticipation of future fires. **We recommend** these standards consider ember exposure, home hardening, and house to house ignition, since many of these fires are wind-driven and that a grant program is developed to support low and moderate income homeowners in implementing home hardening programs. We would also like to see programs to support low income manufactured homeowners to upgrade and retrofit their homes to prepare for future fires.

By strengthening land-use regulations where fire risks are greatest, SB 762 can greatly diminish the chances of losing homes to wildfires. Our land-use laws currently restrict new development in floodplains due to the risk of flooding — so too should our laws limit the construction of new homes in fire-prone forests and shrublands. Forests have burned since the beginning of time and will continue to burn as long as they exist. We need to be smarter about how much we put in harm's way.

As Oregon develops a map of statewide wildfire risk, it is critical that the State of Oregon doesn't only include natural resource risk factors, but also factors that relate to a communities ability to recover from a catastrophic fire. **The wildfire risk map should include** community indicators such as percentage of renters, percentage of homes without adequate insurance, overall rental vacancy rates, percentage of low income residents, percentage of community members with primarily languages other than English, etc. Communities that will have the most



www.RogueClimate.org || PO Box 1980, Phoenix, OR 97535 || 541-301-9204

challenges in recovering from a wildfire, should be prioritized in fire adaptation and prevention programs. We have seen so clearly in the aftermath of the Almeda fire, that the ability to recover from a catastrophic fire is drastically dependent on income level, home ownership, and access to insurance and federal support, and that renters, low income community members, and those who cant access federal support have a much more challenging path to recovery.

Members of the committee, we encourage you to continue strengthening and supporting SB 762.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Alessandra de la Torre".

Alessandra de la Torre, Energy Justice Organizer
Rogue Climate



www.RogueClimate.org || PO Box 1980, Phoenix, OR 97535 || 541-301-9204

INFORMATION (to be deleted before submitting testimony):

Some of the Joseph's policy overview that i thought was important:

BUILDING CODES

Department of Consumer and Business Services shall adopt wildfire hazard mitigation building code standards for new construction

HEALTH SYSTEMS FOR SMOKE

Environmental Quality Commission shall implement a program to mitigate the environmental and public health impacts of wildfire smoke. Oregon Health Authority shall establish and implement a clean air shelter grant program with Office of Emergency Management as lead.

EMERGENCY RESPONSE AND DISASTER RECOVERY

Office of Emergency Management shall update its statewide emergency plan as necessary to prepare for or respond to wildfire emergencies on an area-wide or statewide basis.

REDUCTION OF WILDFIRE RISK

Forestry Department shall design and implement a program to reduce wildfire risk through the restoration of landscape resiliency and the reduction of hazardous fuel on public or private forestlands and rangelands and in communities near homes and critical infrastructure.

OREGON WILDFIRE WORKFORCE CORPS

The Oregon Wildfire Workforce Corps Program is established for the purposes of: (a) Reducing the risk wildfire poses to communities/infrastructure. (b) Help...fire-adapted communities. (c) Train youth/young adults between 13 and 26 who have been qualified.

Greg's email:

Limiting development in fire-prone areas: By strengthening land-use regulations where fire risks are greatest, we can greatly diminish the chances of losing homes to wildfires. Our land-use laws currently restrict new development in floodplains due to the risk of flooding — so too should our laws limit the construction of new homes in fire-prone forests and shrublands.



www.RogueClimate.org || PO Box 1980, Phoenix, OR 97535 || 541-301-9204

One of the things this proposed bill does RIGHT, is that it contains a requirement for the state to map high risk wildfire areas, AND THEN TO USE THOSE MAPS FOR LAND USE REGULATIONS AND OTHER USES. What this would do is tell us where the high risk areas are, and allow for new land use regulations that would limit development in those areas. (Most of you likely know that most fires are human caused, and that the VAST MAJORITY of the costs of fighting fires is protection of structures, and when we spend our efforts doing that we can't work on putting first out.)

If you weigh in on any part of this bill, I hope you will strongly support this portion, which should help reduce development in hazardous places and, in the long run, reduce the tragedies when the inevitable fires to happen. As Clair's email so accurately states, forests have burned since the beginning of time and will continue to burn as long as they exist. We need to be smarter about how much we put in harm's way.

First of all, this is one of MANY bills dealing with this subject. We have thrown our weight behind this one for two reasons:

It is proactive. Some of the various bills are more cautious than others, proposing study and future activities that are likely to delay putting protections in place for communities. This one is focused on taking comprehensive steps now to protect people, the environment, and structures from wildfire risk and prepare for the future.

It is comprehensive. It reflects this comprehensive approach in that it addresses "Statewide Map of Wildfire Risk," "Defensible Space," "Health Systems for Smoke," "Emergency Response," "Resiliency Goal," "Wildland-Urban Interface Protection," and more. The bill language includes headings on each of these topics, so it is easy to jump in and see what is proposed under each.

As far as the land use related elements go:

Context:



www.RogueClimate.org || PO Box 1980, Phoenix, OR 97535 || 541-301-9204

Everyone recognizes that wildfires happen naturally, and that this is not going to end. In fact, there is general recognition that the incidence of wildfire is likely to increase as the climate changes.

Cities have burned since humans first started building them. Again, it is unlikely that we will ever prevent that entirely.

However, there are some things we can do to lessen the likelihood of catastrophic wildfires.

Some of these things follow easily from a few facts, including:

The majority of fires are human-caused.

Most of the really catastrophic fires are either caused or worsened by climate and/or weather. (Lightning, drought, wind, etc.)

A huge and ever-increasing amount of the cost we incur in fighting fires is for protection of structures, rather than actual fire control or suppression, which leads to increased environmental and resource damage.

We are continuing to allow more and more building in high-risk, wildfire prone areas--sometimes knowingly, sometimes without really understanding that is what we are doing. This will only increase our problems and costs later.

It is exponentially more difficult to manage fire risk using tools such as prescribed burns and allowing small fires to run their course when there are buildings and people in the way. This increases our risk and the losses when the inevitable happens.

Land Use:



www.RogueClimate.org || PO Box 1980, Phoenix, OR 97535 || 541-301-9204

Statewide land use planning Goal 7 is “Areas Subject to Natural Hazards.” Goal 7’s objective is “to protect people and property from natural hazards” by reducing risk from natural hazards, including wildfires, through land use planning, coordination, and education.

We can't do that fully if we don't know where the risks are, so this bill requires development of a statewide risk map that is based on consistent definitions of things like the Wildland-Urban-Interface, and that identifies vulnerable populations, critical infrastructure, and other important data layers. Most of this information already exists, so it is mostly about standardizing it and putting it together in one place.

DLCD then needs to analyze updates needed to the land use program and incorporate the risk map into planning. In combination with possible restrictions on unnecessary development in high-risk areas, provisions for defensible space, building codes, evacuation routes, and other considerations will be incorporated.

An independent advisory council is required to make sure the DLCD proposals are robust and meaningful.

There are also requirements for locating and developing a program and facilities to deal with environmental and public health impacts of smoke, including a shelter program

I hope that whatever weaknesses you may find in the bill that you can support these elements.

(Note that a prior version of parts of this bill was in SB 248, which is now dead. Parts were moved into SB 762. In March 1000 Friends, The Nature Conservancy, and Sustainable Northwest provided this testimony, which talks about the need for quick action, the wildfire risk map and how it should be developed and used, and some of the other components of that version of the bill. Like I said, that bill is dead, but the language in a couple of paragraphs in the middle give you some idea of how we are talking about the important elements that moved into this bill.)