



Board of Commissioners

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Good afternoon Chair Wagner, Vice Chair Girod and members of the Committee,

For the record, I am Xan Augerot, Chair of the Benton County Board of Commissioners. I am here today to support SB 863, introduced by Senator Gelser. This simple bill amends ORS 478.260, providing rural fire districts the authority to acquire real property or easements for the purpose of establishing, creating and maintaining fire evacuation routes.

One of the top priorities under the Benton County Community Wildfire Protection Plan is addressing emergency ingress and egress needs for rural residential areas where there is only one road in and out. Over the past four years, working with other jurisdictions including the City of Corvallis and Bureau of Land Management, we have partnered with other entities to create secondary egress routes for at least two vulnerable neighborhoods in the wildland-residential interface.

The Oak Creek Valley Community is one of our most high risk WUI areas with **over 380** homes situated in a forest dominated basin. It is also a key access point to two very popular outdoor recreation areas. There is only one paved route up the Oak Creek drainage, just outside of Corvallis. The only other emergency egress is through steep, one lane forest roads – which may be impassable in the event of wildfire. Oak Creek residents have worked with Benton County and Oregon State University for several years, and have come up with a lowland emergency route across university agricultural lands.

All partners were counting on the Corvallis Rural Fire Protection District as a key partner, to contribute to project funding. However, lacking clear statutory authority to participate in an emergency evacuation route project, they declined support. This bill would provide the authority necessary for Corvallis Rural FPD and any other rural fire protection district, to help provide emergency evacuation solutions in light of increasing wildfire risk, locally and statewide.