



To: Members of the House Committee on Revenue
From: Gregory Monahan, Oregon Chapter Sierra Club
Date: May 11, 2021

RE: Testimony for HB 3160

Dear Chair Evans, Vice Chairs Lewis and Meek, and Committee Members,

Thank you for the opportunity to communicate our views on House Bill 3160. The Oregon Chapter Sierra Club would like to express our strong support for the activities that would be funded by the Oregon Wildfire Preparedness and Community Protection fund under Section C (1) and especially for directing and designating funding for assisting people and communities to live with fire. We can harden our homes to not ignite in fire, and prepare space around our communities to give firefighters and first responders space to operate. Experts estimate that a buffer around all Oregon census-designated places is approximately 100-150,000 acres. By designing and implementing Firewise and similar wildfire preparation programs, we can live with fire.

On the other hand, any attempts to manipulate vast landscapes of vegetation to affect fire behavior are doomed to failure. We write to express our concern about and opposition to broad landscape scale vegetation management. We also write to note the importance of equity regarding charging rural and low-income Oregonians additional fees on their insurance.

The Oregon Chapter Sierra Club respectfully submits that Oregon does not have enough money to address and mitigate the risk to homes and communities and also to treat vast landscapes. Leadership will require our leaders to make hard choices about what to fund, and the safety of our communities must come first. Proponents of landscape scale thinning assert that they have prioritized the work, yet they have identified 5.8 million acres in need of thinning. These acres do not overlap much, if at all, with the areas that burned in 2020. They state that they need \$4 billion dollars to treat this portion of Oregon's landscape, and then in 20 years they will need another \$4 billion or more. This is not feasible or sustainable. We encourage you to take a hard look at the probability of success, and invest the bulk of the

funding in keeping homes and communities safe. By focusing on effective preparedness and protection against wildfires, we also do the best by our wildlife, climate and more.

Based on what the top experts are telling us, the Sierra Club Oregon encourages you to modify HB 3160 to:

- Prohibit fuel reduction activities from harvesting fire-resistant larger, mature trees 21 inches in diameter or greater
- Focus fuel reduction activities in the Wildland Urban Interface near critical infrastructure, homes, and businesses, and especially densely stocked plantations within ¼ mile of communities
- Limit fuel reduction so that it does not reduce canopy cover in a manner that reduces soil moisture
- Prohibit fuels reduction in natural, intact forests

We also encourage you to ensure that thinning practices do not diminish the preservation of genetic material within the forest, and prohibit the removal of seed trees that have a strong genetic make-up and can provide the forest with its next generation of saplings.

We also advocate for strong carbon screening processes for thinning and/or fuels reduction projects, as the best available science tells us that thinning can release more carbon than fire itself. If you do include funding for mechanical fuels reduction beyond the wildland urban interface, we ask that they be properly evaluated to ensure the potential benefits to communities and critical infrastructure are weighed against the cons of the increased carbon emissions and loss of carbon sequestration from vegetation removal.

The geographical location of forests must be considered when any post-fire restoration projects are proposed. Forests located away from communities and infrastructure should be left to regenerate naturally after wildfire, with the possible exception of locations where erosion would damage critical drinking water sources.

Finally, the Oregon Chapter Sierra Club would like to acknowledge the inequity of funding that could arise from taxing insurance policies. Considering that many rural Oregonians are low-income and may not be able to afford these new yearly fees, and the fact that people with multiple insurance policies would be charged multiple times annually, we believe a more fleshed-out section Section 5 of HB 3160 is necessary to ensure equity concerns have been addressed and that low-income rural Oregonians will not be disproportionately affected by the increase in taxation on their insurance policies.

Thank you again for the opportunity to share our comments and concerns.

Sincerely,
Carol Valentine
Chair, Forest Issues Committee
Oregon Chapter Sierra Club