



**OREGON FOREST &
INDUSTRIES COUNCIL**
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Senate Committee on Natural Resources and Wildfire Recovery OFIC & OSWA Testimony on SB 590

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Good afternoon Chair Golden, Vice Chair Heard and Members of the Committee.

My name is Kyle Williams and I serve as the Director of Forest Protection for the Oregon Forest and Industries Council. I am also submitting testimony today jointly with the Oregon Small Woodlands Association. Collectively we represent Oregon's wood products manufacturers and timberland owners of all sizes.

Thank you for the opportunity to share our concerns today over Senate Bill 590.

Someone appropriately asked during the hearing "who would be opposed to this idea?". To be clear, we support the need to address organized fire protection for the under and unprotected lands that are being addressed through this bill. The Rangeland Protection Association (RPA) model has proven to be incredibly successful across the 16 million acres of land in Oregon that had previously been underserved and over exposed to risk and loss from wildfire.

The core of our challenge with the bill as currently drafted, is that it relies on existing infrastructure at the Oregon Department of Forestry to deliver and expand services that are already constrained by a lack of available resources. The RPA program is unique at ODF in that it relies on pass-through General Funds to pay for the staff that administer the program. All other staff within the fire protection program (district staff) are funded via a cost share between our members and the state of Oregon to provide protection for our timber and grazing lands. Many of the RPA lands are in eastern Oregon, where the financial burden of this cost share is already a struggle for landowners. In addition, when staff at ODF that administer the RPA program are over extended, the agency is forced to rely on other district personnel to step in and fill the gap. Our concern is that increasing the acreage eligible for enrollment in RPA's without addressing increased staffing and infrastructure at ODF would further strain the existing staff and resources our members pay for and already struggle to afford to protect their lands.

Another concern is the issue of fires that exceed local capacity and require additional air and contract assets. Existing RPA's rely heavily on support from the federal government in the form of Bureau of Land Management (BLM) fire apparatus to provide resources like helicopters, single engine air tankers, and other forms of contracted resources when a fire exceeds the capacity of a local RPA. The challenge with the new lands being contemplated for enrollment is that they are not as readily near BLM protected lands. Therefore, when additional resources are needed it is likely they will look to the state and ODF for that support. Without additional means of paying for these resources, the existing system (our members funds and the resources that protect our lands) will be drawn away for the RPA needs.

Again, we want to express that we support the need to address the fire risk on these underserved lands. Our goal is to not create unintended consequences for a system that is already overburdened and under resourced.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on this important issue.

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