

SB 839 STAFF MEASURE SUMMARY

Senate Committee On Natural Resources

Action Date: 03/27/23

Action: Do pass and refer to Ways and Means by prior reference.

Vote: 5-0-0-0

Yeas: 5 - Girod, Golden, Prozanski, Smith DB, Taylor

Fiscal: Fiscal impact issued

Revenue: No revenue impact

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Meeting Dates: 3/15, 3/27

WHAT THE MEASURE DOES:

Directs the Oregon Department of Forestry (ODF) to establish by rule a pilot grant program for the purpose of managing wildfire risk by promoting air curtain use by persons that make biochar. Appropriates \$1 million General Fund moneys to ODF for the grant program. Sunsets the program on June 30, 2025. Declares emergency, effective on passage.

ISSUES DISCUSSED:

- Air curtain incinerators as an alternative method for preventative fuel reduction and post-fire clean-up work
- CharBoss smoke and particulate outputs
- Impact on number of smoke days available for other wildfire mitigation activities
- Biochar as a value-added, marketable commodity
- Existing federal, state, and private partnerships to explore woody biomass utilization

EFFECT OF AMENDMENT:

No amendment.

BACKGROUND:

Air curtain burners, also known as air curtain incinerators or fire boxes, were originally designed as pollution control devices for open burning. They can also be used to turn piles of wood waste into biochar, which is a carbon-rich soil amendment that can help restore degraded soils to encourage vegetative growth.

The U.S. Forest Service Rocky Mountain Research Station is currently partnering with industry and land managers to develop mobile air curtain burners, and other demonstration projects are occurring in western states.

Senate Bill 839 would appropriate \$1 million General Fund moneys to the Oregon Department of Forestry for a pilot grant program that promotes air curtain use for biochar production.