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Land Use Planning and Development

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Senate Natural Resource Committee
Chair Golden, Vice Chair Girod, Committee Members,

RE SB 509

The idea of community based programs to reduce Wildfire Risk is a program that most landowners will likely support. Solutions closest to the problem most often are the best solution. The hazards of Wildfire are real and property owners have been taking steps to reduce Wildfire Risk. The time frame to complete a study is September 15, 2024. It has become clear that the original provisions of SB762 to create a Wildfire Risk Map and mandate defensible space and inspections as well as structure hardening have been met with resistance from landowners. Thus the time for the proposed community solution study and possible legislation developed from the study will do nothing to address the mandates that are scheduled to take affect this year. If mandates are suspended until after the study is completed and possible replacement laws are considered, landowners would be much more understanding that the goal is to make the area safer not just create regulations and punishments. I am in support of community based risk reduction. I would also add that SB 81 that would require a study to incentivize landowners to reduce wildfire risk should be added to the Community Solution study required by the present bill.

As has been noted in the 2019 Wildfire Report required by Governor, most of the acres that burn each year are on Federal Lands. I understand that finally some programs are being initiated on federal lands, but the provision of SB 762 falls on private property owners as an absolute requirement while government lands are subject to political and budgetary decisions with no guarantee that the years of neglected management will be reversed or that federal fire fighting policies will step up to stop the destruction that has increased over the last several decades. This was very evident from the testimony of Glenn Casamassa, Regional Forester, United States Forest Service at the Natural Resources Committee meeting of January 30, 2023 when asked what would be done different to fight the disastrous fires in 2020 and 2021. He had no new solutions being developed to address the fires on federal lands because of the unprecedented lightning strikes and rough terrain and that they are limited by numerous acts that they must follow that restrict their ability to fight fires.

I hope that this bill is amended to give property owners the respect they deserve for initiating Wildfire Risk Reduction and provide some direction in the current legislative session to build on the work that is being done by the property owners. We need and deserve a new direction on how to address Wildfire Risk.

Respectfully,
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