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WESTERN ENVIRONMENTAL LAW CENTER

February 6, 2023

Senate Natural Resources Committee
Chair Golden
Vice Chair Girod
Committee Members

Written Testimony Re: SB 509-1**Relating to community-based programs for reducing wildfire risk**

Submitted by: Pam Hardy, Western Environmental Law Center

Western Environmental Law Center writes today in support of SB 509, which would fund the development of community-based programs and home hardening assistance for wildfire risk reduction. This bill is an appropriate next step after SB 762, and the public feedback following the Wildfire Risk Map. It aims to help the public better understand their exposure to wildfire risk, and gives them practical tools and valuable incentives to do something about it. Further, by allowing grants for redistribution by municipalities, it offers practical ways of putting the final decisions in local hands where people are well situated to evaluate their risk.

This is a step in the right direction.

Just as importantly, federal and other funding sources are becoming available for the same purposes, and many of those programs require match. This program could provide that, attracting dollars to Oregon that will go directly to benefitting the public.

The Western Environmental Law Center is a non-profit public interest environmental law firm. We use the power of the law to safeguard the public lands, wildlife, and communities of the western U.S. in the face of a changing climate. In Oregon we have invested deeply in building community support for restoration of our dry, fire-adapted forests, through participation in several collaboratives from Deschutes County through the Blue Mountains. This has allowed us to have conversations with a wide variety of people from communities at high risk of wildfire, and some that have already been through it.

Communities have widely varying levels of preparedness. Some are highly sophisticated, and working cooperatively with the Forest Service to get adjacent lands treated. Others see the risk

as somewhat distant, and unlikely to affect them. Of course, there's also everything in between. For most, especially in rural communities where the risk is often highest, the financial resources to fix the problem are simply out of reach. This can help break that logjam. By supporting those that want to act, this program starts in the right place. Success breeds success when people see the results. Based on our experience with communities in eastern Oregon, we expect that these incentives will make the right kind of difference.

In conclusion we thank the committee for taking up this important work, and look forward to seeing these ideas come to fruition in our state.