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February 6, 2023

Senator Jeff Golden, Chair, and Members  
Senate Committee on Natural Resources  
State Capitol, OR

Re: SB 509

Chair Golden, Vice-Chair Girod, and members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony in support of Senate Bill 509 with the -1 amendment on behalf of the more than 74,000 members and supporters of the Oregon Chapter Sierra Club.

The Oregon Chapter Sierra Club strongly supports establishing a program to assist municipalities and residents in preparing homes and communities to better withstand the impacts of fire. We also support placing this program under the expertise of the Office of the State Fire Marshall.

As climate change has brought us longer fire seasons along with worsening drought and more extreme fire weather, a small percentage of wildfires have caused devastating impacts to communities throughout our state. We have witnessed the limitations of current forest management practices for keeping Oregonian's homes and communities safe under these unprecedented and extreme conditions. Experts such as Dr. Jack Cohen, Ret. US Forest Service Research Scientist, tell us that working from the home outward is the most effective and efficient way to reduce the risk of loss from wildfire.

There are scientifically proven steps residents can take to alter the landscape within 100 feet of their home and to make the home itself less susceptible to ignition by embers. But many community members who reside in high wildfire risk areas lack the necessary means and know-how and are overwhelmed when confronting these steps. This cooperative program would provide much-needed grant assistance and expert consultation for low-income families, as well as for municipalities charged with protecting nonresidential buildings and infrastructure.

We also laud the bill's provisions for incorporating significant public input on rules, and for coordination among a broad roster of agencies and organizations. If coordinated properly, the state would be well positioned to receive federal funds from both the Infrastructure bill and the Inflation Reduction Act.

SB 509 is the right approach for helping Oregon deal with the increasing risks we face from wildfires. The Oregon Chapter Sierra Club urges you to advance this legislation.

Thank you,

Elizabeth Dix  
Chair, Legislative Committee  
Oregon Chapter Sierra Club