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WESTERN ENVIRONMENTAL LAW CENTER**Written Testimony of the Western Environmental Law Center
Submitted January 26, 2023****Joint Committee On Ways and Means Subcommittee On Natural Resources
Public Hearing: House Bill 5020
Thursday, March 2, 2023
1:00 p.m.**

Co-chairman Dembrow, Co-chairwoman Pham, and members of the Joint Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony on House Bill (HB) 5020, which provides funding for the Oregon Department of Forestry. The Western Environmental Law Center (WELC) writes in support of strong funding for three programs that address landscape resilience and collaboration as a response to wildfire.

WELC is based in Eugene, Oregon, with offices in Portland and Bend, Oregon; Seattle, Washington; Taos and Santa Fe, New Mexico; Helena, Montana; and Buena Vista, Colorado. WELC uses the power of the law to defend and protect the American West's treasured landscapes, iconic wildlife, and rural communities. We combine our legal skills with sound conservation biology and environmental science to address major environmental issues in the West in the most strategic and effective manner. WELC works at the national, regional, state, and local levels and in all three branches of government. We integrate national policies and regional perspective with the local knowledge of our 150+ partner groups to implement smart and appropriate place-based solutions.

WELC is also deeply engaged in collaborative forest conservation in eastern Oregon, working closely with the Blue Mountains Forest Partners and Harney County Restoration Collaborative on the Malheur National Forest, the Ochoco Forest Collaborative on the Ochoco National Forest, the Deschutes Collaborative Forest Project on the Deschutes National Forest, and the Northern Blues Forest Collaborative on the Umatilla and Wallowa-Whitman National Forests. Our collaborative work has allowed us to work with a wide variety of stakeholders from top scientists in the land management field to people who have lost their homes and businesses to wildfire. We are committed to helping build solutions that keep our communities safe from wildfire while at the same time ensuring that our forested ecosystems are adapted to wildfire.

Addressing the wildfire crisis requires multiple approaches and involves all landowners (private, state, federal). In WELC's view, the most effective approach to wildfire risk reduction is articulated in the [National Cohesive Wildland Fire Management Strategy](#) (Cohesive Wildfire Strategy), which aims to "work collaboratively among all stakeholders and across all landscapes, using best science, to make meaningful progress towards the three goals: 1) Resilient Landscapes; 2) Fire Adapted Communities; and 3) Safe and Effective Wildfire Response." The

vision of the Cohesive Wildfire Strategy is “to safely and effectively extinguish fire when needed; use fire where allowable; manage our natural resources; and as a nation, to live with wildland fire.”

To achieve that vision, WELC supports full funding for the following programs within the Oregon Department of Forestry (ODF).

Landscape Resilience Program: Created in 2021 by SB 762, the Landscape Resilience Program invests in large landscape restoration projects across Oregon. Because the scale of the restoration need is large, this program meets this challenge at scale by targeting investment in large landscapes most at risk from uncharacteristic wildfire. The program has catalyzed diverse interests to collaborate on actions that use prescribed burning, mechanical thinning, and other treatments to increase the ecological integrity of forested ecosystems and their resilience to wildfire, which can help increase the resilience of nearby communities.

The Landscape Resilience Program was funded at \$20 million in 2021-2023 but was reduced by nearly \$8 million in the Governor’s Recommended Budget for 2023-2025. While we are sympathetic to the need for fiscal efficiency, given that the State now predicts a budget surplus, WELC requests that this program’s funding be restored to the full \$20 million as requested in the ODF Agency Request Budget.

Small Forestland Grant Program: Also created by SB 762, the Small Forestland Grant Program is comprised of two grantmaking opportunities: the Small Forestland Grant Program and the Firewise Community Grant Program, both of which provide competitively awarded grants to support small forestland owners in reducing wildfire risk on their properties. The Small Forestland Grant Program provides voluntary incentives that implements the Cohesive Wildfire Strategy by empowering smaller landowners to improve forestland health, which contributes to larger landscape resilience. In its first year of grantmaking, this Program received more requests for funding from small landowners than was available, demonstrating strong landowner demand for assistance.

The Small Forestland Grant Program was funded at \$5 million for 2021-2023, but was reduced by \$2 million in the Governor’s Recommended Budget for 2023-2025. As with the Landscape Resilience Program, WELC requests that this program’s funding be restored to the full \$5 million as requested in the ODF Agency Request Budget.

Federal Forest Restoration Program: The Federal Forest Restoration Program has a long and successful track record of accelerating the pace, scale, and quality of forest restoration on federal lands in Oregon. As prolific collaborators in eastern Oregon, WELC has seen firsthand the value of providing collaborative capacity to citizen-led groups in Oregon’s dry forests and to facilitating the use of Good Neighbor Authority agreements by the state and federal land managers.

WELC strongly encourages full funding of the Federal Forest Restoration Program, especially the collaborative capacity and Technically Assistance and Science Support (TASS) grants. Collaborative capacity grants ensure that successful forest collaboratives in the state have the

capacity they need – whether third-party neutral facilitators, research and monitoring assistance, or the development of zones of agreement – to develop science-based restoration treatments that have broad social agreement. TASS grants help stakeholders answer important scientific questions about land management in order to facilitate public understanding of the effects of land management, which builds social license for restoration actions.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on ODF’s budget and some of the important and necessary programs it administers. If you have any questions about our testimony, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Susan Jane M. Brown". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

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