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Joint Ways & Means Subcommittee on Public Safety

Testimony on HB 5036: Department of State Fire Marshal Budget

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Co-Chair Sollman, Co-Chair Evans, and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on HB 5036, the budget for the Department of the State Fire Marshal (DSFM) for the 2023-25 biennium.

The Nature Conservancy (TNC) is a science-based, non-partisan organization committed to conserving the lands and waters on which all life depends. In Oregon, TNC has over 80,000 supporters and members in every county. Based in communities around the state, we manage lands and waters in varied ecosystems and partner with ranchers, farmers, fishers, timber, and environmental interests on some of the most challenging conservation issues facing people and nature.

Oregon, like much of the Western U.S., is experiencing ever-more intense wildfire seasons driven by longer, hotter, and drier summers. As a result, our forests, rangelands, and surrounding communities, are increasingly vulnerable to severe wildfire and smoke impacts. The Department of the State Fire Marshal is a critical agency that helps keep Oregon's communities safer and more resilient in the face of extreme fire. As the lead agency for structural wildfire prevention, DSFM is a key implementer of SB 762 (2021) which authorized DSFM to increase staff capacity for community risk reduction and wildfire response programs, to develop defensible space standards, and to design incentive programs that reduce wildfire risk in communities. TNC supports the continued investment in SB 762 implementation, including support for SB 80 this session which advances several important improvements to SB 762 programs, and emphasizes the importance of ensuring DSFM capacity and resources to do this critical work.

**TNC supports POP 100: Community Risk Reduction and Response**, which would continue initial investments made in SB 762 for Response Ready Oregon and add to the Community Risk Reduction Fund. The Community Risk Reduction Fund was funded at \$87 million in the 2021-23 biennium but reduced to \$40 million in POP 100 in the Governor's Recommended Budget. We recognize the budget constraints in this session and appreciate the Subcommittee's efforts to sustain this important work. POP 100 also establishes four permanent positions to support community wildfire protection plan development and implementation, defensible space treatments, and public education and outreach.

TNC supports building agency capacity to maximize leverage of state investments through the capture of federal match dollars from the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) and the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA). Both the IIJA and IRA provide opportunities for significant federal investment in wildfire risk reduction and community preparedness programs, but some grants, such as USDA Community Wildfire

Defense Grants and FEMA Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities, do require match to receive funds.

TNC is committed to continued work to ensure SB 762 programs and implementing agencies have the capacity to manage and implement this critical work. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony and your thoughtful approach to DSFM's budget.