

Co-Chair Senator Elizabeth Steiner  
Co-Chair Representative Tawna Sanchez  
Members of Joint Ways and Means Committee

Re: SB 5506 State Budget

Dear Co-Chair Senator Elizabeth Steiner & Co-Chair Representative Tawna Sanchez, et al:

Please accept this written testimony on the SB 5506 State Budget as part of the public record of this hearing in Ontario, OR on April 28, 2023. I am requesting that you add the so called "landowner offset" from SB 762 to the state's general fund budget. This offset of \$15million was included in the bill as a way to increase funding for adding resources to the state wildfire protection program. Although the continued funding was requested by the Oregon Department of Forestry (ODF) as Program Option Package (POP) 111, that request was not included in the governor's budget so the request just died.

Now ODF has developed FY24 fire protection budgets for the various protection districts across the state including the same wildfire resources previously funded by the \$15million in SB762. However, the funding for these resources is now budgeted to be paid by the landowners as a dramatic increase in per acre fire protection assessments. For example, the Northeast Oregon District (NEO) budget is simply too expensive for private landowners to afford. The FY24 private land timber rate is \$2.31 per acre, a 34.1% increase and for grazing it is \$.723 per acre, a 58.4% increase. These rates dramatically exceed the amount that private landowners are able to pay for fire protection.

If wildfire control is a statewide issue, and I believe it is, as did the former governor and previous legislature, then all the citizens in the state should help to bear the costs of the legislatively mandated increases in wildfire protection. Without the landowner offset as it is poorly named, the costs of the increases in service are born only by the private landowners. This unfunded mandate is unfair to landowners and just plain wrong! There needs to be a permanent general fund solution developed. ODF FY 2024-2025 POP111 requested a one-time funding of \$14 million to allow for continued stakeholder (private landowner) and legislative conversation on the full extent of the SB762 investments. This "conversation" needs to happen before the FY24 budgets are finally approved. The \$14-15 million needs to be made a permanent funding investment if the SB762 personnel and equipment investments are continued to be permanently.

I respectfully request that the \$15million be added to SB5506 State Budget for the coming biennium and that the legislature makes this a permanent funding source for the complete and coordinated wildfire protection program in our state.

Sincerely,  
*Robert Messinger*

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