

Josie Koehne: Testimony in Support of SB 1511

Chair Golden, Vice-chair Girod and Members of the Committee

Thank you for this opportunity to speak in support of **SB 1511**.

My name is Josie Koehne. My husband and I are small forest owners with 80 acres in the eastern foothills of the Coastal Range just north of Hagg Lake in Washington County. I am here today speaking for myself as a forest owner in the **Wildland Urban Interface** since 2010. I am not here representing any organization.

In September of 2014, we evacuated due to the [Scoggins Creek Fire](#) at the recommendation of local police and Fire Departments. The fire originated on nearby Stimson Lumber property, just to the west of us. I remember standing with our neighboring forest owners on the top of our property looking down on Hagg Lake, watching the planes and the Super Scooper, an amphibious airplane, scoop up lake water and drop it just to the west of us. We could see that the smoke of the fire was just a small ridge or two away with winds blowing our way. We evacuated, but our neighbors stayed put, and by luck, the winds changed course just in time and the fire was put out. So, I know what it feels to have your forest, your home and outbuildings in jeopardy due to wildfire.

According to an Oregonian article after the fire had been contained on September 24th by [Ian Kullgren](#), **467 personnel** had responded to the fire, and **130,000** gallons of water was dropped from the air at a total wildfire fire cost estimate of **\$1.87 million**. Thanks to the proximity to Hagg Lake, the helicopters and a Super Scooper, with the help of numerous private and public firefighters, the fire was contained to just 211 acres.

SB 1511 addresses the need for **community fire protection**, with grant funding administered by the Fire Marshall's office and planned with local community and local government input. This is a voluntary, rather than mandated program, that allows for local community control to set its own priorities and plans for community protection, with the help of the Fire Marshall's risk assessments and recommendations for protecting the home ignition zone, and **provides community grant funding** to implement them. It is a brilliant solution to the risk mapping controversies raised not long ago after the passage of **SB 762**. In addition, by acquiring accreditation after implementation of the fire protection plan, and by working with insurance companies, hopefully Oregon can get better insurance protection and lower premiums statewide, to avoid the fiasco of insurers leaving the state, with homeowners unable to insure their homes as required by law. This could lead to lower property values, as we know has happened in California after their catastrophic wildfires. In fact, this is already happening in Oregon! Our son was initially turned down for homeowners insurance on a new suburban rental in Hood River because Hood River is considered a high risk fire zone. Lack of homeowners insurance could affect homes sales of all kinds across the state.

This a thoughtful bill that spends our limited finances for wildfire focused on our lives and property first, rather than wasting it trying to prevent wildfire on vast tracks of unpopulated forestland. Fires can originate anywhere, and can be spread by embers miles away under the right wind and drought conditions that we now face due to climate change. It is wise to focus funds to protect our communities pre-emptively, where the greatest losses would be felt. Once Oregon has committed to funding this program, additional funding can be leveraged and matched by federal money from the IRA and other sources, such as the Firewise USA program. Spending for protection upfront will be far less costly then after our homes and lives are destroyed by fire!

Please support SB 1511, the sensible way to address the increasing impacts from wildfire due to climate change.