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House Committee on Revenue

Testimony on HB 4133:

Submitted by: Kyle Smith

Chair Nathanson, Vice-chairs Reschke and Walters, and Members of the Committee:

As the Director of Government Relations for The Nature Conservancy in Oregon, I write you today regarding HB 4133. We are not taking a position on this bill but want to use the opportunity to testify to underscore the importance of the topic and the need for continued dialogue regarding wildfire in Oregon.

The Nature Conservancy (TNC) is a science-based, non-partisan organization, with over 80,000 supporters in Oregon alone, committed to conserving the lands and waters on which all life depends. Throughout the state, our team of scientists, conservation practitioners, land stewards, and fire managers, based in communities across the state, partners with ranchers, farmers, fishers, timber, environmental interests, and Tribes to plan, implement, and monitor restoration efforts that increase landscape resilience, reduce wildfire risk to communities, and sustain the many benefits that healthy ecosystems provide to nature and people. We are unique in this regard, known for both our efforts to advance critical science to inform ecologically appropriate conservation and natural resource management solutions, and also as a conservation landowner, directly responsible for land stewardship and ecological restoration across thousands of acres in Oregon.

Through this work, we have firsthand experience in the science and stewardship of landscapes to prepare for, respond to, and evaluate the impacts of wildfire. (See attached factsheet regarding Sycan Marsh Preserve and the 2021 Bootleg Fire) It is for this combination of knowledge and expertise that we were asked to participate in a wildfire funding working group convened by Senator Steiner. Entering the process, we set for ourselves the following principles to guide our engagement:

1. We are deeply committed to advocacy and policy development to address the risks of extreme wildfire to people and nature, as evidenced by our work to advance SB 762 in 2021 and SB 80 in 2023. **By engaging in this process, we hoped to continue elevating the importance of holistic solutions to address the wildfire risk to both people and nature.**
2. We believe that stable funding solutions for both wildfire suppression efforts and wildfire mitigation are essential to increase landscape resilience and community safety in the face of a rapidly changing climate. Addressing the root cause of extreme wildfire is critical to decreasing the long-term costs and impacts of extreme wildfire on people and nature. We do not want reactive funding for fire suppression, although critical, to continually undermine proactive investment to the strategies that will address the root cause driving increasing costs and impacts of extreme wildfire. **Throughout this**

process we advocated that proactive investments in wildfire mitigation strategies (both community risk reduction and landscape resilience) should be given equal consideration as an essential part of any long-term solution to fire management.

3. We want forests to remain forests, for the range of ecological, social, cultural, and economic values they provide. We are concerned that increasing wildfire suppression costs, in the form of growing landowner assessments, will place significant financial burden on some private landowners, particularly small landowners and landowners in the drier, lower productivity forests that are the focus of TNC's dry forests and fire conservation strategy. **We entered these conversations with a commitment to support solutions that would address rising fire protection costs and help forestlands remain forestlands as we work toward a long-term strategy to reduce wildfire risk and increase landscape resilience to fire.**

In the end, we are disappointed the final bill does not include an option to create stable funding to support proactive mitigation and long-term wildfire risk reduction to landscapes and communities. We understand the inherent challenges to developing stable revenue sources for this critical work and why this decision was necessary. However, we are encouraged by HB 4133, not because it achieved all of our desired outcomes for the process, but because it catalyzed important conversations around a critical issue and set the stage for future conversations and collaboration to advance the solutions we need to effectively address the interrelated issues of community risk, landscape resilience, and climate adaptation in the face of extreme wildfire.

We thank Chair Marsh, the members of this Committee, and Senator Steiner for their leadership and we are grateful for the opportunity to have been a part of the discussion. We remain committed to exploring options for and interest in proactive wildfire mitigation investments as part of a more holistic strategy in the months and years ahead.

Respectfully,

Kyle Smith
Director of Government Relations
The Nature Conservancy in Oregon

Funding Priorities for a Fire-Resilient Oregon

Oregon has experienced years of record-breaking, high intensity wildfires, threatening communities, harming forest and rangeland ecosystems, and destroying over 4,000 homes and structures since 2020.

More than \$12.7 billion worth of homes in Oregon are at risk from wildfire, with smoke impacting human health and damaging tourism and economic development.

The Oregon legislature passed foundational policies to respond to the Oregon wildfire crisis in SB 762 (2021) and SB 80 (2023). Continued investments are necessary to sustain and scale this work to protect communities, critical infrastructure, and vulnerable populations.

This comprehensive funding package makes strategic investments in core wildfire mitigation programs in anticipation of the 2024 wildfire season and supports communities implementing new defensible space and home hardening standards. Proposed investments are for programs that failed to receive sufficient funding to sustain activities in the 2023 session.



Creating defensible space around homes. Source: Oregon State Fire Marshal

SUPPORTED BY:





Ponderosa pine forest with understory thinning followed by prescribed fire. Source: Fotogal

INVESTMENT COMPONENTS: TOTAL \$29 MILLION

<p>COMMUNITY WILDFIRE PROTECTION:</p> <p>\$13 million for the OSFM Community Risk Reduction Program to mitigate wildfire risks to homes and communities, including defensible space treatments and actions to facilitate effective wildfire response and evacuations.</p> <p>\$5 million to OSFM to create a neighborhood protection cooperative program to promote wildfire resilient communities (SB 1511 - 2024 session).</p>	<p>\$18 MILLION</p>
<p>LANDSCAPE RESILIENCY:</p> <p>\$3 million for the ODF Landscape Resiliency Fund for five projects that will restore forest health and reduce wildfire risk to critical public resources.</p> <p>\$2 million for ODF to continue the development and initial implementation of the Oregon 20-Year Landscape Resiliency Strategy, including resources for program prioritization, public engagement, and monitoring and reporting.</p>	<p>\$5 MILLION</p>
<p>PUBLIC HEALTH AND SMOKE MANAGEMENT:</p> <p>\$2 million to DEQ, \$2 million to OHA, and \$2 million to DHS to establish smoke monitoring and mitigation programs that protect vulnerable populations from wildfire smoke and prepare plans to apply prescribed fire on key landscapes safely.</p>	<p>\$6 MILLION</p>

FOR MORE INFORMATION, CONTACT:

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