

February 26, 2024

Senate Committee On Finance and Revenue

RE: Oppose SB 1593 as amended

Chair Senator Meeks, Vice-Chair Senator Boquist and members of the committee,

My name is Mike Barsotti. I'm a family forest landowner and a forester for over 48 years. I was a member of Oregon Department of Forestry Incident Management Teams for 29 years. I have also served on two committees that dealt with wildfire and wildfire funding: the Governor's Council on Wildfire Response, and the 2020 Legislative directed study on the Cost of Wildfire Preparedness and Suppression.

I am opposed to SB 1593 -2 amendments for so many reasons it would take hours to fully articulate.

It is clear that as our climate is warming, the costs of wildfire prevention, suppression, and recovery are increasing and that the state needs to figure out how to properly fund these increasing costs to protect Oregonians and our forests.

To have the forest sector pay more taxes to fund a list of non-forestry, non-wildfire reduction programs will not reduce the risk of wildfire or better protect communities, and will not improve the health and resiliency of our forests. It can only make things worse.

Is a study even needed? And if it is, this bill does not provide adequate time to do the topics justice.

If there is to be a study with adequate time to provide a quality product, this bill does not ask the right questions. There needs to be a set of questions that can provide answers that inform the Legislature on a path forward. For example, if the bill's premise is that the forest sector needs to pay more through taxes:

- What services should be funded by the forest sector?
- Is the forest sector paying its proper amount compared to other business sectors?
- What are the strengths and weaknesses of current forestry related taxing methods?
- What is the proper amount of funding from the public for wildfire?
- How should Oregon fund the landowners' and the public wildfire related responsibilities?
- How do adjacent states tax their forest sector? (This was address in the 2020 Legislative directed study).
- What is the most effective and efficient method for the forest sector to pay it appropriate share of revenues to the state?

And finally, if there is a study with an agreed upon set of questions, who best should be a member of the study? They need to bring an expertise to the table. This bill lists organizations that could provide little information to the issue of how much and how best to tax the forest sector. The list also includes groups that may financially benefit from the bill or the proposed severance tax, so I wonder if they would provide impartial and meaningful information.

I ask that you do not move this bill forward.

Mike Barsotti, Lyons