

My name is Silas Skinner, I am a 6th generation rancher from Jordan Valley Oregon. I am currently the president of the Jordan Valley RFPA, an organization we started with the help of the Oregon Department of Forestry in 2007. I'm here today to ask for support for HB 3349, the Jordan Valley RFPA is a strictly volunteer rangeland fire protection group made up of 100 ranchers that are trained to fight rangeland fires from around the Jordan Valley area. Although we have received a few grants over the years and some equipment through the forestry department, the ranchers and the landowners shoulder the biggest cost of stopping the fires in our area. The Jordan Valley RFPA has been credited with saving millions, and I mean millions of acres from burning. Firefighting is an extremely expensive endeavor which we accrue every year.

This past year (2024) I received phone calls and text messages from the BLM telling us good luck we are stretched too thin across the state and do not have any resources available, your RFPA is going to have to do the best it can until we can get you help. This has happened many times in the past few years as well due to the BLM being shorthanded.

On July 24th we had a lightning storm come through our area this year which lit multiple fires, having been in contact with the BLM prior to these events we knew we were the only line of defense. The RFPA put out several fires the first night in the Owyhee canyon and continued to monitor those fires until the BLM was able to get a couple trucks and helicopter there. However, we had a fire at the Hole in The Ground in the Owyhee canyon that we were not able to contain the first night. That fire grew to just over 95,000 + acres (the size of 95,000 football fields) in a matter of hours the fire behavior was extreme this year. I know that the amount of training that we have had no doubt saved us from anyone getting hurt or killed. One of my sons did his first training this year he commented several times before fire season that "this is all common sense". After the fire season he is a big advocate for training. The power of these fires and the speed at which they travel is mind blowing. On the 3rd day of this fire the RFPA had 35 resources on the fire and put in 25 miles of fire line with four-wheeler sprayers and our trucks. Had we not got the line around in front of the fire that night there is no doubt in my mind it would have grown into one of the largest fires in our area in a long time. The amount of money it would have cost our state is unimaginable. We ruined 9 tires on our converted army trucks which cost us around \$23,000 to replace. The fuel and wear on the trucks comes directly from the ranchers. With additional funding and equipment, I feel we can do a better job of protecting our public and private lands in Oregon. If we can respond quickly and with more equipment, I know we can be a lot more efficient and effective.