

Submitter: Noel Nelson
On Behalf Of:
Committee: Senate Committee On Natural Resources and
Wildfire
Measure, Appointment or SB1541
Topic:

Dear Chair Golden, Vice-chair Nash, and Members of the Committee,

Good evening or as they say where I grew up, howdy! Ever since I was tiny tyke living in John Day, OR, I dreamt of a better, cleaner, and more bountiful future with no pollution like what I saw in my father's favorite TV show, Star Trek, The Next Generation. I spent a decade chasing that dream on the other side of the country – becoming an energy scientist and thinking that we would have plenty of time to transition to clean, renewable energy. And I thought the increase in natural disaster frequency and severity by climate scientists was too uncertain and exaggerated. I couldn't have been more wrong. On August 14th, 2015, I saw my home neighborhood incinerated before my eyes. I was visiting my Dad and he asked me to go into the Canyon with him south of John Day right after the evacuation order was lifted. The smoldering wasteland I saw before me, where many of my neighbors' houses once stood, still haunts me to this day. Luckily, there were no fatalities. However, two-thirds of my neighbors lost their homes, and many did not rebuild. The beautiful forests that once decorated the walls of the canyon and surround hillsides were replaced by ghastly matchsticks. My father's house survived, but he sold it soon afterwards. He is lucky that someone even agreed to buy it. Much of the land within the blight of the Canyon Creek Complex fire remains empty and unused. Those who remain in the shadow of the burn-scar have become accustomed to greater erosion, damaging wind, and greater flooding in the spring. Sadly, I know I'm not alone in suffering the consequences of devastating droughts and wildfire. According to the Oregonian, the top five largest wildfires in Oregon's history have occurred within the last 25 years. For context, the sixth most damaging wildfire (which occurred in 1933) was less than half the size of the record holder. What's worse: A headwaters economics report found that almost half of the costs of wildfire are paid for at the local level, including lives lost as well as the economic costs to homeowners, businesses, and government agencies. The science is clear about the correlation between greenhouse gasses and the increase in global temperature. It is time that we shift these costs from our communities to fossil gas companies and other polluters where it belongs and hold them accountable. As legislators, you have the power to shift the costs from your constituents to these mega corporations. I urge you to pass SB 1541 and finally make these polluters pay for the damage they've done to communities across our state.

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