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Joint Ways and Means Subcommittee: Capital Construction

Testimony in support of SB 80 with the -10 amendment: Relating to Wildfire

Submitted by: Pete Caligiuri, Forest Strategy Director

Co-Chair Girod, Co-Chair Holvey, and Members of the Committee:

As the Forest Strategy Director of The Nature Conservancy in Oregon, I'm pleased to write in support of SB 80 with the -10 amendment. 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. Our staff, comprised of scientists, conservation practitioners, land stewards, and fire managers based in communities across the state, lead restoration efforts to increase landscape resilience, reduce wildfire risk to communities, and sustain the many benefits that healthy ecosystems provide to nature and people.

In 2021, the Legislative Assembly enacted Senate Bill 762, a comprehensive wildfire package that invested in dozens of programs and initiatives with three key themes: creating fire-adapted communities, increasing the resiliency of Oregon's landscapes, and developing safer and more effective wildfire response. Sustainable and effective forest management takes time and continued investment and Senate Bill 80 builds on and refines the work that began with SB 762. TNC supports SB 80 with the -10 amendment

We are excited to see the inclusion of the Prescribed Fire Liability Program (formerly HB 2985) within SB 80. Prescribed burning is an important management tool for maintaining forest health and resilience, while reducing the risk of extreme wildfires to communities and natural resources. This bill creates a Prescribed Fire Liability Fund that will help mitigate landowners and burn operators' risk and address concerns over escaped prescribed burns. This investment is critical to increasing the use of prescribed burns across the state. Another key barrier to prescribed fire implementation is limited workforce capacity and resources to get the work done. To that end, TNC supports inclusion of HB 2986 as well, which would establish a Prescribed Fire Capacity Grant Program to provide the necessary equipment and workforce to plan and implement more prescribed burns.

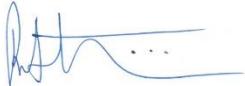
Investing in community adaptation and resilience to future wildfire threats is important and challenging work. TNC supports the inclusion of the Community Risk Reduction Fund (formerly SB 509). This fund will establish grant programs to incentivize landowners to complete defensible space, home hardening, and other fuels reduction treatments, all proven best practices, to mitigate wildfire risk and reduce home exposure and susceptibility to future wildfires.

Finally, it is worth underscoring that these state investments are particularly important at this unique moment in time, as required non-federal match to the significant federal funding flowing to Oregon through programs, such as USDA Community Wildfire Defense and FEMA Building Resilient

Infrastructure and Communities programs, and as complementary investments to other Inflation Reduction Act and Bipartisan Infrastructure Law funding to support landscape resilience and wildfire risk reduction.

We thank Chair Girod, Chair Holvey, and the members of this Committee for your leadership and steadfast dedication to this critical issue and urge you to move this bill forward this session.

Respectfully,



Pete Caligiuri
Forest Strategy Director
The Nature Conservancy, Oregon