

Submitter: Helena Virga
On Behalf Of:
Committee: Senate Committee On Natural Resources and Wildfire
Measure, Appointment or Topic: SB83

Public Testimony in Support of SB 83 Oregon Senate Committee on Natural Resources and Wildfire

Chair, Vice Chair, and Members of the Committee,

My name is Helena Virga, and I am submitting testimony in support of Senate Bill 83. Although I work for Firefighters United for Safety, Ethics, and Ecology (FUSEE), this testimony represents my personal support and is not on behalf of our organization. The work I do for the organization advocates for a shift in wildfire management that prioritizes ecological integrity, community resilience, and the safety of those most impacted by fire.

SB 83 represents a crucial step forward in addressing Oregon's wildfire risks through proactive, science-based solutions. In particular, I want to highlight two key provisions: the engagement of the Oregon Conservation Corps (OCC) in assisting rural landowners with defensible space and the bill's strong environmental protections.

The Oregon Conservation Corps: Supporting Rural Landowners

Many rural property owners lack the financial resources, technical knowledge, or physical ability to create and maintain defensible space around their homes and properties. SB 83 rightly prioritizes leveraging the Oregon Conservation Corps to assist in this effort, ensuring that wildfire mitigation is accessible and equitable. By employing trained young people to conduct vegetation management and fuel reduction projects, OCC not only supports community safety but also provides workforce development opportunities in fire-adapted land management. Investing in this program will empower rural communities to reduce their wildfire risks while fostering the next generation of fire practitioners.

Environmental Preservation: Protecting Oregon's Natural Landscapes

While reducing hazardous fuels is essential, SB 83 wisely avoids the outdated, ineffective strategy of large-scale commercial thinning in sensitive areas. Instead, the bill maintains crucial environmental safeguards by restricting thinning in federally protected habitats and inventoried roadless areas. Research consistently shows that strategic, science-informed fuel treatments—such as prescribed fire and small-scale mechanical thinning in the wildland-urban interface—are far more effective at reducing community wildfire risk than commercial logging deep in the backcountry.

SB 83 recognizes this distinction, balancing fire hazard reduction with ecological integrity.

By supporting SB 83, Oregon can take a bold step toward proactive wildfire mitigation that is both community-driven and ecologically responsible. I urge you to pass this bill to ensure that rural landowners have the support they need to protect their homes and that our forests remain resilient for future generations.

Thank you for your time and consideration.