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Senate Committee on Natural Resources and Wildfire
900 Court St. NE
Salem, OR 97301

Re: Central Oregon LandWatch Testimony on Senate Bill 1551 - Support

Chair Golden, Vice Chair Nash, and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on SB 1551. Central Oregon LandWatch (“LandWatch”) is a Bend-based, non-profit, public interest organization with over 1100 members. LandWatch’s mission is to defend and plan for Central Oregon’s livable future, and we have advocated for conservation in Central Oregon for 40 years. Increasingly, fulfilling this mission requires policies that improve our communities’ resilience to and ability to live with fire.

LandWatch strongly supports SB 1551 and the broader effort to promote home hardening as part of a statewide fire mitigation strategy.

By prohibiting deed terms and HOAs from limiting the use of fire-hardened building materials or requiring the use of non-fire-hardened building materials, this bill allows homeowners to take critical steps toward fire preparedness.

Research has consistently demonstrated that structure hardening is one of the most effective approaches to mitigating catastrophic fires. Reducing structural vulnerability requires thoughtful construction at both the individual building and neighborhood level, including installation of nonignitable roofing materials and ember-resistant vents, ensuring that gutters remain free of flammable debris, preventing contact between wooden fences, decks, and steps and flammable surfaces of a home, and removing flammable vegetation and other materials immediately surrounding buildings (Calkin et al., 2023; Cohen, 2000). These measures are important for all modern construction in the western United States, and particularly in communities that directly interface with fire-prone and often fire-suppressed landscapes.

LandWatch is keenly aware that wildfires are a fact of life in Central Oregon and many other parts of the state. However, whether these fires destroy neighborhoods, businesses, and infrastructure is a matter of sound policy decisions and community-level preparation. By enabling more fire-hardened homes, this bill will strengthen Oregon’s fire-adapted communities and reduce the growing threat of urban conflagrations.

We respectfully urge this committee to pass SB 1551. Thank you for considering these comments.

Sincerely,

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References

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