



March 23, 2020

Re: Testimony on HB 2722

Chair Witt and Members of the House Committee on Agriculture and Natural Resources:

The undersigned organizations appreciate your focus on proactive efforts to increase community preparedness and reduce future wildfire risk while building resiliency to withstand the increasing severity and frequency of wildfires in Oregon.

The extreme 2020 wildfire season underscores the need for significant policy reform and increased investments in wildfire preparedness and response to protect lives, property, and public health and safety. The 2020 fire season was felt by all of us, no matter our community, but was especially difficult on people who were already struggling. Oregonians across the state are extremely concerned with wildfires and their impacts—risk to life and homes; harm to the health of our forests, watersheds and wildlife habitats; and negative economic implications for businesses.

State and local governments have moved quickly to respond, but the work is far from over. Continued attention and long-term investment are required as communities and forests rebuild and heal. However, we cannot afford to focus on the past alone. To shift current trends, a forward-looking, comprehensive approach is required to achieve community preparedness and wildfire risk reduction, and we must act before the next wildfire season hits.

An essential first step is developing a state wildfire risk and hazard map, which would directly inform the rebuilding of our communities after last year's fires and provide needed data to inform deliberations on many other wildfire-related policies being considered this session. This mapping effort should be built upon a consistent definition of the Wildland Urban Interface, incorporate fire hazard data, and implement best practices in its design.

With devastating wildfires ahead, we commend this committee for its attention to our state's urgent need for data-driven wildfire risk mapping, defensible space requirements, and fire-resistant building codes. We would also like to note that the Senate Natural Resources and Wildfire Recovery Committee is working to address these same issues in an omnibus wildfire policy package represented by SB 248-1 and SB 287. Given the tremendous urgency and importance of this work, we encourage you to collaborate with your Senate colleagues to coalesce around a single, comprehensive wildfire policy proposal for the Oregon Legislature to consider and enact during this legislative session.

In the wake of last year's tragic fire season, we must act quickly to plan ahead, prepare, and invest in the work that we know will make our communities and landscapes more resilient. We are committed to working with you to further refine and enact solutions.

Thank you for your consideration and leadership.

Sincerely,

Amelia Porterfield, Senior Policy Advisor, The Nature Conservancy

Dylan Kruse, Director of Government Affairs, Sustainable Northwest

Mary Kyle McCurdy, Deputy Director, 1000 Friends of Oregon