



The League of Women Voters of Oregon is a 100-year-old grassroots nonpartisan political organization that encourages informed and active participation in government. We envision informed Oregonians participating in a fully accessible, responsive, and transparent government to achieve the common good. LWVOR Legislative Action is based on advocacy positions formed through studies and member consensus. The League never supports or opposes any candidate or political party.

February 5, 2020

To: Senate Committee on Wildfire Reduction and Recovery
Senator Jeff Golden, Chair
Senator Herman Baertschiger, Jr., Vice Chair
Email: swr.exhibits@oregonlegislature.gov

Re: [SB 1536](#) – Recommendations from the Wildfire Council – **Comments**

The League of Women Voters of Oregon supports the 19 statewide land use goals and support policies that promote both conservation and development of land as a natural resource. The League began its study of land use back in 1959. We support both Goals 3 and 4, protecting our agricultural and forest lands and Goal 14 that focuses on complete communities. We believe that one of government's most important roles is protecting the public's health and safety. With those positions in mind, we address some of the elements of SB 1536 below:

*Requires Department of Land Conservation and Development to oversee and coordinate development and maintenance of comprehensive statewide map of wildfire risk. Requires department to establish minimum standards and provide consultation to cities and counties to implement and maintain wildfire risk planning and zoning and to develop wildfire risk mitigation standards. Requires Insurance Commissioner to order insurers to identify and provide incentives for policyholder actions to reduce wildfire risk. **We believe that this element will provide information to local jurisdictions to consider planning and zoning that not only protects those living in fire risk areas, but the rest of Oregon who currently may have to pay for local disasters.***

*Requires State Fire Marshal to establish minimum defensible space requirements. Requires local government to administer and enforce applicable State Fire Marshal defensible space requirements. Allows local government to adopt local defensible space requirements in excess of State Fire Marshal requirements. **We believe this element sets basic standards but also allows local jurisdictions to consider the best way for its residents to protect themselves.***

*Requires local government to periodically report to State Fire Marshal regarding compliance with defensible space requirements. Requires State Fire Marshal to maintain map of defensible space requirements and compliance. **This requirement will encourage action on this issue. The concept of defensible space has been a topic of conversation for years, but few counties have programs to actively promote or require it.***

*Requires State Fire Marshal to administer and enforce program to provide assistance to local governments for administration and enforcement of defensible space requirements. Establishes Wildfire Defensible Space Fund. Establishes creation of defensible space on lands of certain underserved populations as priority use of financial assistance. **We support the housing of this job with the State Fire Marshal's Office as they have a current relationship with many local jurisdictions as they are called upon to protect residential property. We caution the legislation to review the number of bills where adding staff to address this important issue is housed and select the best mechanism for getting this job done with locals.***

*Requires Department of Land Conservation and Development to establish program to assist counties and cities to adopt local building code provisions and local wildfire safety requirements that exceed state requirements. Creates Local Wildfire Response Fund. **We believe that DLCD can provide guidance to local jurisdictions; however, we are leery of setting up the various "Funds" called out in this bill without specific criteria for the use of the funds.***

*Requires Oregon Health Authority to establish standards for residential smoke filtration systems. Requires authority to establish program to increase availability of systems among vulnerable persons residing in areas susceptible to wildfire smoke. Authorizes authority to issue grants to increase availability of systems. **We are uncertain that there is money in the budget at this time to provide these systems, but look to OHA to see if there is a way to provide help through our Coordinated Care Organizations.***

*Establishes task force to identify barriers to installation of smoke filtration systems in areas susceptible to wildfire smoke. Requires task force report no later than September 15, 2021. Sunsets task force December 31, 2021. **This task has merit as we are confronted by the reality of increasing wildfires close to where people live. Before we budget monies to help address the issue, we need to better understand the challenges.***

*Requires county to assist landowners and jurisdictions to form, expand or change boundaries of jurisdiction that provides wildfire protection. Requires county to assist jurisdiction in developing adequate wildfire protection facilities, equipment, training and other resources. Requires that county ensure lands susceptible to wildfire are provided with wildfire protection meeting or exceeding baseline level no later than January 1, 2025. **Oregon's wildfire protection organizations are an incredible resource, but we know there are places in this state not covered by these local heroes. This is a job undone and counties are given the time to have those conversations locally.***

*Requires State Forestry Department to contract for services of private consultant to evaluate and make recommendations on specified issues regarding wildfires. Requires consultant to report to Governor and legislative committee no later than September 15, 2022. **We have been impressed by the consultants hired to help with the department's billing issues and we have seen where having outside eyes (as in the Dept. of Environmental Quality's wastewater program) has been invaluable to resetting an agency's business model. We support this element.***

We also recognize that, in 2020, the Dept. of Forestry needs an infusion of cash to make it through this biennium. And that there should be funds set aside for the 2020 fire season. Due to these expensive needs, we caution the Committee as you move this bill to Ways and Means to carefully consider which elements we must have and can afford in 2020 and which need to be set along on a path for future investment. We deliberately did not comment on the elements related to timber harvest and utilities. We believe there are adequate voices on many sides of these issues that will provide you with guidance as you make your policy and funding decisions.

We thank the Governor, the Wildfire Council and this legislature for recognizing the importance of our timber industry and the role you all have in protecting human life. We stand ready to help as you work to meet these challenges and ask that you consider our requests.



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