

December 5, 2014

Honorable John Boehner  
Speaker of the House  
H-232, US Capitol  
Washington, DC 20515

Honorable Mitch McConnell  
Senate Majority Leader  
317 Russell Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

Honorable Nancy Pelosi  
House Minority Leader  
H-204, US Capitol  
Washington, DC 20515

Honorable Harry Reid  
Senate Minority Leader  
522 Hart Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Speaker Boehner, Majority Leader McConnell, Minority Leader Pelosi, and Minority Leader Reid:

The Oregon Board of Forestry implores you to take action to resolve “fire borrowing” within the US Forest Service (USFS) and Bureau of Land Management (BLM) budget structures. With resolution of this fiscal practice, these agencies will plan and implement forest restoration and management more consistently. This is critical to reducing the risk of uncharacteristically large wildfires. We encourage you to craft a solution from the bi-partisan frameworks introduced in the 113<sup>th</sup> Congress, S1875 introduced by Senators Ron Wyden (D-OR) and Mike Crapo (R-ID) and its companion bill HR3992 introduced by Congressman Mike Simpson (R-ID) and co-sponsored by the 5-member Oregon delegation in the House of Representatives.

A longstanding policy of fire exclusion coupled with a reduction in active forest management has produced a large accumulation of fuel for wildfires. This combination of policy and management decisions has shifted forest densities, structure, and composition, and reduced the resilience of habitat, watershed health and human communities. Like much of the West, fire seasons in Oregon are longer due to warmer and dryer climate trends. Under current conditions, wildfires exhibit a strong potential to grow in size very rapidly. Placed into a social context, this translates to a direct impact on public health, communities, homeowners, and business owners.

According to the West Wide Wildfire Risk Assessment, 6.5 million acres of forests in Oregon are considered to be at moderate to high risk to wildfire. The occurrence of wildfire on federal forests poses an immediate risk to adjoining landowners. There are approximately 753,000 homes within Wildland Urban Interface areas in local Community Wildfire Protection Plans. In addition to the elevated risk of fire, Oregon’s communities have first-hand experience with the social impacts from large influxes of smoke from wildfires.

Oregon just concluded the second of back-to-back extreme wildfire seasons. Over these past two seasons, the Oregon Department of Forestry deployed Incident Management Teams 18 times on large State-protected fires and 12 times on large Interagency (Federal & State) fires. This level of deployment puts significant elevates concerns over firefighter safety. In the summer of 2014, Oregon was the national priority for fire suppression resources for 31 consecutive days.

Oregon is demonstrating that preventative forest health treatments can be implemented with additional funding for preventative forest health treatments. Oregon is benefitting from accelerated restoration on the National Forests in northeastern Oregon’s Blue Mountains region. In particular on

the Malheur National Forest, the number of *acres treated has increased* due to investments from the Collaborative Forest Landscape Program, *timber volume has tripled* over the last three years due to strong collaboration and the award of a 10-year Stewardship Contract, and *unemployment has dropped 3%* in the past year in this rural economy.

A 2012 report<sup>1</sup> demonstrated a 6-to-1 return to the State economy for investments in forest restoration on National Forests in Oregon. In response to this strong business case, the *Oregon State Legislature committed funding to assist the USFS with project implementation*. To our knowledge, this is the only program of its kind where State funds are being used to collect data and perform pre-sale activities on Federal lands. This commitment by our State legislators underscores the urgent conditions to increase resiliency of our federal forests and rural communities.

Given this context, the Oregon Board of Forestry requests that Congress act to address funding for wildfire suppression. In particular, we ask Congressional leaders to craft a solution to end fire borrowing based on the bi-partisan framework presented in S1875 and HR3992. In addition, we ask Congress to increase program funds that facilitate proactive management activities to increase the health and resilience of federal forests, and adjacent communities.

Respectfully,

Tom Imeson  
Chair – Oregon Board of Forestry

Cc:  
Honorable Representative Earl Blumenauer  
Honorable Representative Suzanne Bonamici  
Honorable Representative Peter Defazio  
Honorable Representative Kurt Schrader  
Honorable Representative Greg Walden  
Honorable Representative Mike Simpson  
Honorable Senator Ron Wyden  
Honorable Senator Jeff Merkley  
Honorable Senator Mike Crapo  
Governor John Kitzhaber

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<sup>1</sup>

[http://oregonforests.org/sites/default/files/publications/pdf/OR\\_Forest\\_Restoration\\_Econ\\_Assessment\\_Nov\\_2012.pdf](http://oregonforests.org/sites/default/files/publications/pdf/OR_Forest_Restoration_Econ_Assessment_Nov_2012.pdf)