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Land Use Planning and Development

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Wildfire Programs Advisory Council, Doug Grafe, Wildfire Programs Director

Dear Council Members and Mr. Grafe,

A topic for discussion this month is the need for funds to implement the Wildfire Program. I have listened to Senator Steiner's presentation for a \$10 fee for each lot in Oregon. It was said in the meeting that this is not a perfect solution but was a good start. An issue is that an individual property owner would pay the same amount as a 300 unit apartment owner. A business such as Nike would pay the same amount per lot as small barbershop sole proprietor. And finally I did not hear what the role of federal government would be based on their hundreds of thousands of acres through out the state. I was at a town hall with Senator Golden who is championing another proposal to restore a severance tax on timber with the proposal going to a vote of the people. I was not able to see the exact wording. Senator Golden also said there is another funding proposal being drafted. Any funding proposal should go to a vote of the people as this is a state wide problem and a state wide solution is required.

After observing meetings with state staff and County Commissioners this past fall, I am concerned about the future of the Wildfire Program even with the amendments of SB 80. The revised map as shown at these meetings has not significantly changed from the map that was part of the original plan. The appeals process as a contested case hearing will likely discourage people from filing an appeal and from staff comments, there is no expectation of changes to the map to any degree. I doubt that you will receive many public comments until the revised map is released again. By then it may be too late to make any changes that the public will support. From the meetings with the counties it became clear that property owner efforts to reduce fire hazard through defensive space vegetation modifications and home hardening by structure changes will not be a basis to change the map.

Wildfire is a great concern to all the residents of Oregon and something must be done. However there needs to be a comprehensive program that addresses all fire issues. We need to have a equitable funding source, standards for property modification based on incentive instead of punishment, and forest management to include federal lands. Unless we address all these issues we will be forced to fight a losing battle. Good intentions are not enough. Otherwise we may have a similar situation as the Land Use Program in Oregon where resource land preservation was the goal but the unintended consequence is a housing crisis. The last thing we need is to drive rural development to be unsafe and unaffordable as much of the character of Oregon includes living outside of cities. I refuse to be forced off my land in rural southern Oregon or have property rights taken to prevent development of land outside urban areas.

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