October 30, 2012

John Blackwell, Chair, Oregon Board of Forestry  
Doug Decker, State Forester  
2600 State Street  
Salem, OR 97301

RE: CFF Support for the Recommendation to Include Prescribed Fire in the BOF’s Fire Protection Work Plan

The Committee for Family Forestlands (CFF) is appreciative of the Board’s interest and focus on East Side forest management issues including the risks of wildfire, and wants to contribute to the discussion on Wildfire Risk (Agenda item 9 at the BOF Public Meeting, November 7). Wildfire is a critical concern to family forest landowners throughout Oregon, but has overtones singular to the East Side.

In particular, the CFF wants to be sure that the discussion includes prescribed fire. Prescribed fire can and should be a key strategy to protect lands from wildfire, as well as a central part of an approach to comprehensive ecosystem management. We recognize that each of the many different forest types has a different relationship and response to fire, which is affected by current stand conditions. ODF is well aware of the current risks associated with forest stand fire conditions. Because conditions in much of Central, Eastern and Southern Oregon are not conducive to safe and widespread use of prescribed fire, we support and encourage increased stand management activities that would allow for wider application and successful reintroduction of fire into this landscape.

While potentially a powerful tool for all land managers, prescribed fire has risks and dangers for private landowners, and particularly family forest landowners, arising from the intermixing and adjacency of public and private lands all across the East Side. The exposure of private forests to the risk of wildfire spreading across the landscape from federal lands is a frequently-voiced concern on the East Side. That risk and exposure arises from forest management policies and actions that can be addressed, in part and on both sides of the ownership boundaries, through the active management of stand density and fuel loads using thinning and prescribed fire. But the risk and exposure a private landowner would assume should a prescribed fire escape and burn onto Federal lands is huge and highly inequitable as compared to the risk public land managers face should wild or prescribed fires cross onto private lands. This may hinder or discourage actions that should be fostered. Clearly addressing the symmetry of risk should be a part of the proposed Fire Protection work plan.
The CFF encourages the Board to lead efforts to improve opportunities for landowners’ use of prescribed fire to meet forest management objectives and to also consider the particular ecological, economic and policy challenges family forestland owners face with respect to fire in the landscape.

Most sincerely,

The Oregon Committee for Family Forestlands

Craig Shinn, Chair

Susan Watkins, Vice-Chair

cc: Oregon Board of Forestry Members
    Peter Daugherty, Private Forests Division Chief

The Committee for Family Forestlands is a statutory committee appointed by the Board of Forestry to provide advice and recommendations regarding family forests and includes family forestland owners from different areas of the state, environmental organization and forest industry representatives, a citizen-at-large and ex-officio members representing the Oregon Department of Forestry (ODF), Extension Service, Oregon Forest Resources Institute, the Oregon Small Woodlands Association and logging or forestry consulting interests.