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Testimony of Elaine Oneil, Executive Director of the Washington Farm Forestry Association, to the House Rural Development, Agriculture & Natural Resources Committee **in support** of **HB 1168 concerning long term forest health and the reduction of wildfire danger** on Jan 22, 2021.

Chairman Chapman and Committee members, my name is Elaine Oneil. I represent Washington's small forest landowners as the Executive Director of the Washington Farm Forestry Association. We support the need for, and intent of, this bill. However, we feel there are amendments required to adequately capture landowner assistance needs.

The forest land census commissioned by the legislature in 2019 under SB 5330 is in. From it we know that there are 218,000 small forest landowners across the state. Collectively they own 2.88M acres or 15% of all forest land. That land base is undergoing rapid change, with many new owners who lack the skills and experience necessary to adequately address forest health. These lands tend to be located nearer to towns, often within the wildland urban interface. If we are to get a handle on forest health, these folks need help. DNR already has a small forest landowner office dedicated to helping these same people on technical matters relating to forest harvesting. Our amendments to this bill would enlarge the scope and funding available to that office to serve forest health needs while providing an opportunity to establish a one-stop shop for landowners requiring technical assistance, forest health and stewardship information, or cost share program assistance. Given the breadth of program delivery, proposed amendments would also place the management of the small forest landowner office under direct management of the state forester. And finally, while we appreciate the need to focus efforts in specific geographies as outlined in forest health and forest action plans, in order to ensure justice and equity for all landowners we believe that small forest landowner assistance should be available for all within the timeframe they require across all small forest lands of the state.

These amendments have been discussed with DNR and we are working on a pathway forward. Thank you

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