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House of Representatives

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Representative Brad Witt, (503) 986-1431

Rep. Witt calls hearing on impact of extreme forest fire season

Salem, Ore. – Rep. Brad Witt (D-Clatskanie), chairman of the Oregon House Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee, will call a hearing on the \$28 million unfunded liability (beyond the allocated budget levels and insurance policy) for wildfire suppression, due primarily to inadequate management of federal lands.

According to Rep. Witt, mismanagement of federal lands has greatly increased the severity and scope of wildfires on lands where the state is responsible for wildfire suppression. “Many wildfires start on federal land but quickly move onto state or privately-owned lands,” said Rep. Witt. “This is one example of a much larger issue for our national forest management strategy. By neglecting to care for our forests, we jeopardize not only our environment but also our financial liability.”

Oregon has been charged with subsidizing all forest fire suppression efforts, including those of the federal government. With an annual budget of approximately \$10 million from the general fund, \$10 million from landowners and \$25 million covered through an insurance policy, the state has already exhausted \$73 million this year. Already over budget by \$28 million, the state will continue to be responsible for all fire suppression costs through June 30, 2014.

On Tuesday, the House Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee will feature officials from the Oregon Department of Forestry and private landowners devastated by severe wildfires.

Tuesday’s hearing will be essential for the legislature to highlight areas where federal land managers can focus on containing wildfires and mitigating crossover to state and privately-owned lands. “We must do everything within our ability to find a long-term solution that protects our precious lands,” said Rep. Witt.

The informational hearing on the “2013 Forest Fire Season” will be held on Tuesday, September 17, 2013 at 2:00 pm in Hearing Room D of the Oregon State Capitol.