



August 5, 2020

State Senator Margaret MacDonald
Local Government Interim Committee
State Capitol
Helena, MT 59601

RE: PD 0003 Regional Fire Authority

Dear Madame Chair and Committee,

The forest landowner members of the Montana Wood Products Association would like to take this opportunity to comment on the above referenced draft bill.

As you know, the forest landowners were opposed to SB 17 entitled, Authorize creation of regional fire protection service authorities, during the last legislative session. The major concerns were the lack of a process to detract undeveloped class ten property classified as forest land from the authority and the financing authority that held the potential to double tax forest landowners that currently pay into the fire preparedness assessment.

You may remember the panel discussion at Local Government committee meeting last November, where a forest landowner reiterated our concerns. We were led to believe, as an outcome of this meeting, that the committee would work to find a solution to both major issues.

Therefore, we were gratified to see the draft presented to at the July Local Government meeting that had inserted language in Section 14 that addresses the process for detraction and language in Section 17 that states, "The amount levied on property classified as forest land pursuant to 76-13-102 must be calculated by reducing the aggregate total levied by the amount paid for wildland fire protection as provide in 76-13-201. If the amount paid for wildland fire protection is greater than the amount levied by the fire authority, the property classified as forest land is exempt from an assessment levied by a fire authority".

Even though we are not sure the process for detraction will in fact work, we appreciate the committee hearing our concerns. Likewise, we felt the committee heard our concerns regarding the Financing Authority.

That is why were dismayed and very disappointed in the committee's action to strike the language in Section 17 pertaining to classified forest land and the assessment. Even with Section 14 remaining in

the bill, action to strike Section 17 puts us right back where we were last session in our opposition to the bill.

We welcome the opportunity to continue to work with the committee to find a resolution to the financing issues, but in the draft's current form, we must regrettably oppose the bill.

Sincerely,

Julia Altemus

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