

BEFORE THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND ENVIRONMENT  
March 11, 2019

**Testimony of Gregory Haller on HB 2656 – The Safe Waters Act of 2019**

1. Chair Helm and members of the House Committee on Energy and Environment, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on the Safe Waters Act of 2019. My name is Greg Haller and I am the Executive Director of Pacific Rivers, a regional conservation group that has been working to protect rivers and their watersheds for over thirty years. I have over 25 years of experience working to protect and manage freshwater ecosystems, including four years as a water treatment plant operator, providing drinking water for over 10,000 customers.

2. The legislation you have before you today represent an opportunity for Oregon to take control of its climate future and protect our most vital life-source: clean water.

3. There are 163 communities in Oregon that get their drinking water from surface waters. Most are located in western Oregon, with 50 coastal communities getting their water from watersheds where the majority of land is privately owned forestlands. This represents tens of thousands of residents who are uniquely vulnerable to the effects of industrial forestry.

4. The role that healthy forested watersheds play in providing clean water is well known. They filter pollutants, sediment, nutrients and harmful bacteria. They store storm water, slowly releasing it to streams and rivers, lessening flood risk. Healthy forests act as a natural infrastructure saving communities

millions of dollars in avoided costs in chemical usage and infrastructure upgrades. Many communities are investing in their forested watersheds as a cost-effective means of ensuring a reliable supply of clean water for their customers. In Oregon, Portland's water is celebrated for its cleanliness because action was taken to protect it from the effects of logging over one hundred years ago. Unfortunately, most Oregonians don't enjoy such protections for their drinking water.

5. There is ample evidence that many Oregon communities have been impacted by industrial forest practices. Rockaway Beach, Triangle Lake, Siletz, and Arch Cape are just a few examples.<sup>1</sup> Costly upgrades to infrastructure, and even orders to not drink the water are not uncommon results of poorly managed watersheds. Some communities have bought or are seeking to buy their watersheds in order to protect their drinking water supplies. But for most, this simply isn't an option, and their water supplies remain vulnerable.

6. HB 2656 addresses fundamental weaknesses in the current Forest Practices Act that increase risk to water supplies: clearcut logging, the use of pesticides, herbicides and fertilizers, and the massive forest road network which is a chronic source of sediment pollution to streams. Sediment pollution increases the amount of chlorine needed to disinfect water. But when too much chlorine is used,

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.dailyastorian.com/archives/gazette/news/arch-cape-keeps-water-https://www.oregonlive.com/environment/2013/08/oregons-rules-for-logging-priv.html>  
<https://www.opb.org/news/article/6-things-you-should-know-about-the-triangle-lake-p/>

carcinogenic disinfectant byproducts are formed. The drinking water of many communities has exceeded safe levels of these chemical compounds.

7. 2656 will prohibit Type III Harvest Units– the 120acre clearcuts, with exceptions for ecological purposes like promoting early seral habitats. It will ban the use of pesticides. And it will require landowners to identify problem roads and fix or remove them. Eliminating these practices will result in greater forest health, reduced treatment costs, and a cleaner, safer finished product. It will also benefit fish and wildlife.

8. Detractors of 2656 will tell you the geographic extent of the law is simply too large and the economic impact too onerous, particularly for small landowners. But most small timberland owners don't implement clearcuts or use helicopters to spray chemicals. Detractors will also tell you that the current law provides adequate protection. You should not be distracted by these arguments. The evidence is incontrovertible that the OFPA is not adequate at protecting streams. And there are simple workarounds that can exempt small landowners from the requirements of 2656. The real targets of this legislation are the large multinational corporations (the Wall Street Foresters) that own the bulk of the forestlands in Oregon.

9. This legislation was borne from the premise that access to clean drinking water is a basic human right. It is also premised on the notion that it is fundamentally unjust for rich corporations to shift the considerable cost of their activities to struggling downstream communities. 2656 will restore balance and

ensure that all Oregonian have a safe and reliable supply of drinking water in the future.

10. Recent reporting has shed light on the influence that the timber industry has with members of the legislature and over regulating agencies like the Department of Environmental Quality.<sup>2</sup> For example, when DEQ tried to release a report that identified logging as a threat to coastal drinking water supplies, the timber industry and the Oregon Department of Forestry attacked the agency and the report was shelved.<sup>3</sup> Oregonians rightfully question whether the air they breath and the water they drink is safe. This committee has a chance to change that narrative and support an equitable balance between profit and protection.

11. I urge you to move this bill into a work session so more detailed information can be considered and the final contours of this bill can be developed. Thank you for your consideration.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://projects.oregonlive.com/polluted-by-money/part-1>  
<https://projects.oregonlive.com/polluted-by-money/part-3>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.opb.org/news/article/oregon-private-forests-to-water-quality-risks/>