

Tiffany Mitchell
STATE REPRESENTATIVE
DISTRICT 32
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HB 2656 Testimony

Chair Helm, Vice-Chairs Reschke and Schouten, members of the committee--thank you for giving me the opportunity to testify before you today. For the record, my name is Tiffany Mitchell, and I am the state representative for House District 32.

I can tell you that I have recently heard, via email, from a number of constituents in my district who are private forestland owners that are fully in opposition to this bill. As their state representative, I would not be doing my job if I didn't bring to this committee today their concerns over how this bill would impact them, or not draw attention to the fact that a number of them have submitted testimony in OLIS. These are all people who proclaim their love for their forests, and their desire to be responsible in their management. I sincerely believe that these small woodland owners *do* want this for themselves. They feel that this bill will significantly impact their ability to properly manage their forest and get a return on their investment—generally a minimum of 20 to 30-year commitment in planting, growing, and harvesting their land, and starting the cycle over again.

Watershed health, and particularly coastal watershed health, are integral parts of life that contribute to the presence of not just clean drinking water for people, but are also essential to the health of our rivers and fish. Coastal watersheds are inextricably tied to our forests, as they capture fog and mist condensation as it rolls through off the ocean. The roots of the trees also hold the soil together, largely preventing sediment runoff into rivers and streams during rainstorms that could impact life that depends on that water. And though my aforementioned constituents would likely disagree, HB 2656 takes a position that what we are doing right now in terms of forest management may be harming these watersheds, and seeks to remedy that by proposing changes to current practices.

Before I continue my testimony today, it is important that I note that I'm not an ecologist or expert in forestry management. I am a state representative with two types of voices in my district on this issue—and they're voices that often don't agree: that of timber and private timberland owners in my district, and that of a growing number of constituents who feel like they would be well-served by the changes in forestland management called for by this bill. And I have a responsibility to both to be as fair as I can.

That said, it's a tough spot to be in as a state legislator--fully acknowledging that timber creates a good chunk of revenue for your district, as well as creates family wage jobs—albeit, not as many as it used to—and, at the same time, combat some major cognitive dissonance since being exposed to voices calling for me to re-evaluate the trust I have typically entrusted in Oregon's forestry management practices. Voices from all up and down HD 32's coast, from Astoria to Tillamook, have approached me with their own concerns about how they feel their watersheds have been negatively impacted by forestry

management in our state. What really drove me to question, however, was becoming acquainted with Rockaway Beach, a beautiful small town in Tillamook County.

If you simply Google “Rockaway Beach” and “water turbidity”—turbidity in this case being a technical term for sediment and debris in water—you’ll come across a number of things. The “Rockaway Beach Citizens for Watershed Protection,” a group that I’m certain has been dismissed a number of times in the past as simply anti-logging environmentalists, pops up onto the page. And two years ago—I might have felt the same way, because I assumed the practices in our state were always intended to be focused at sustainability. Further down the list, however, you’ll come across a number of more “objective sources”—people who might not get completely caught up like actual citizens who depend on Jetty Creek for their water. One of these sources, which I have submitted along with my testimony in OLIS, is an article done by Oregon Public Broadcasting titled “After Pushback, Oregon Scraps Report Linking Private Forests to Water Quality Risks.”

Though the article focuses on forestry practices and watershed health as a whole, among other things, the article highlights continuing problems with Rockaway Beach’s watershed, fed by Jetty Creek. It details that citizens of Rockaway Beach for a number of years received notices from the city about harmful chemicals in their water, a byproduct of a mixture of sediment combined with the chlorine normally used to disinfect the water supply. Too much of that combination can be harmful to human health—and getting these notices was a commonplace occurrence for many years for Rockaway Beach until they had to invest hundreds of thousands of dollars in an expensive water filtration system to combat the issues.

But where the sediment came from is just as interesting as the compromised water itself. OPB’s analysis points to the fact that Jetty Creek flows through private forestland, 80% of which had been logged in the recent years leading up to the water contamination. In the most simplistic terms, the loss of this forestland resulted in compromised soil structure, leading to increased amounts of erosion during the rainstorms we’re apt to experience out on the Coast. That dirt and sediment went into the creek—and down into the drinking water supply of the residents of Rockaway Beach. I have also submitted, with my testimony, a “source water assessment summary brochure” showing that as far back as 2003, Rockaway Beach was already calling out logging activity as being one of two likely causes to the water turbidity—the other being a “borrow pit.” This is not just happening in Rockaway Beach, however, and I have submitted information on OLIS about other communities along the coast, as well as a report done by OSU scientists about how current logging practices can affect streamflows.

According to OPB, a report was drafted in 2015 by Oregon’s Department of Environmental Quality that identified logging as contributor “to known risks for drinking water quality in communities up and down the Oregon coast.” Though a draft of the report exists and has been submitted to OLIS with my testimony, it is worth nothing that according to this OPB piece, the report was never published because of intense pushback by industry and the Department of Forestry.

I truly believe we can continue to have the good, family wage jobs and income for our coastal communities from timber harvests, while at the same time, having a responsible discussion about perhaps looking at changes to the way we do business here in Oregon to promote the greatest permanent value for the state. While this bill may not be *the* solution, it is a new chapter in helping us to continue these talks as productive and needed next steps in order to reconcile the interests of two very different—

but equally important—voices in my district. By continuing this dialogue, I believe that we can address long-term forest health for multiple values—the greatest permanent value—to protect the rights of property owners, as well as the rights of those who also deserve to have clean drinking water.