

Support for HB 2594
Directing the Department of Forestry to Better Protect
Community Drinking Water Supplies

Chair Helm and Members of the House Committee on Water,

Thank you for your public service and for the time to testify today. My name is Samantha Krop and I am the Coalitions Coordinator for the Forest Waters Coalition, a growing network of conservation voices and grassroots community members working to gain stronger protections for Oregon's forested watersheds. I am here to testify in support of HB2594, a first step towards protecting community drinking watersheds from the harmful effects of industrial logging practices. While this bill is a small step in the right direction, water managers and community members need stronger tools for addressing the costly and hazardous impacts of clearcut logging in their drinking water supplies.

Oregon's environmental regulators have identified logging, road building and associated chemical spraying as a threat to more than 170 public water systems across the state. In just the past twenty years, more than two dozen communities had almost half of their drinking watersheds logged by big industrial forest owners. Through my work with the Forest Waters Coalition I come into contact with many of these communities—Oregonians experiencing the impacts of clearcut logging in their backyards.

Oregon's current forest practices allow corporations to clearcut vast areas, logging right across steep mountain slopes and within 20 feet of drinking water sources. After logging, timber companies spray toxic chemicals from the air to kill native trees and shrubs, which can end up in our drinking water. These practices affect both water quality and quantity, especially when conducted on a watershed scale, and communities across Oregon are paying the price.

Communities like Rockaway Beach have witnessed over 90% of their watersheds logged completely. As a result, Rockaway and other towns like Corbett are already spending millions on new water treatment facilities needed to purify drinking watersheds filled with sedimentation from clearcut logging upstream. Sadly, all of these logging practices are fully legal and protected by the current Oregon Forest Practices Act.

Compared to our neighbors in Washington and California, Oregon has the weakest logging laws protecting community drinking water from the impacts of clearcut logging. Already, 3 million dollars a year are withheld from the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality because our state's forestry rules are not in compliance with best

management practices and clean water standards from the Environmental Protection Agency.

Top forest scientists at Oregon State University and other institutions have found that current logging practices are degrading our cherished rivers and streams. Oregon State University scientists have found that clearcut-plantation forestry can reduce water levels during summer months by 50% when compared to adjacent, unlogged watersheds. These reductions in streamflow persist for over five decades. Against a backdrop of climate change, bringing on warmer temperatures, longer drought seasons and more acres burned in wildfire, we cannot afford to undercut our community's precious drinking water supplies with short-sighted forest management.

While HB2594 offers a path toward potentially increasing drinking water protections, it must be said that leaning on the Oregon Department of Forestry to implement these changes is not a viable solution for our communities. ODF has historically proven itself to be ill-equipped to implement changes to its outdated management practices, a point illustrated clearly by the agency's failure to adopt a meaningful plan to address carbon sequestration and storage as required by Governor Brown's Executive Order 20-04 on climate change. Many of us have already been engaging with ODF to address harmful forest practices and have received little to no support from the agency.

Lately, the Oregon Department of Forestry has told communities like Rockaway Beach that they should buy their watersheds from destructive land managers. This suggestion fails to address the unfortunate reality that even if communities are able to raise the necessary funds, many industrial forestland managers simply don't want to sell. The original draft of this bill offered water managers the powerful tool of using eminent domain to gain public ownership of industrial forestlands in community drinking water supplies; in its current form HB2594 will have limited effect in supporting water managers and communities when timber managers don't answer the phone or respond to requests for collaboration. While changes to stream classifications and greater site-specific protections for drinking watersheds are useful steps, alone they will not lead to meaningful watershed protection for our communities.

Oregonians overwhelmingly support broader protections for forested watersheds. It's time for our legislation to reflect the weight and urgency of this issue. Please support HB2594 as a humble starting place, and then go much farther to ensure that our communities have clean and abundant drinking water for generations to come.

Sincerely,
Samantha Krop

Forest Waters Coalition