

To Committee Chair Nathansan, Vice Chairs Pham and Reschke, and members of the House Committee on Revenue:

I am writing today to share my thoughts in opposition to HB 2379.

After years of retirement saving and dreaming, in 2019 my wife and I were able to purchase a small forest property in Vida. Resources from OFRI and classes from the Extension broadened our retirement plan to include nurturing our forest's resilience, improving wildlife habitat, sequestering and storing carbon, and contributing to a healthy McKenzie watershed. Then the Holiday Farm Fire happened.

Now our beautiful multi-aged forest is gone—as is our hope that a future small-scale harvest might pay for medical care in our waning years. If we don't want to live the rest of our lives surrounded by dead trees, we must replant. Our savings are limited—and so we cling to the hope that the few acres we can salvage harvest (which we must do in order to be able to replant those acres) might cover the cost of seedlings, site prep, planting and vegetation management. We hope we might break even.

We have no quarrel with existing harvest taxes—especially the portion that funds the forestry education goldmine that is OFRI. The current tax structure isn't broken—but many Oregonian lives like ours have been—by pandemic, by ice storms, by fire...

In the case of this bill specifically, it is an unmistakably personal irony that, should our (again, post-fire salvage) harvest tax monies be redirected from OFRI to a new fire fund, as HB 2379 proposes, we will go from paying into something that makes us better woodland stewards to something that will do nothing for us whatsoever. When the Holiday Farm Fire roared through our part of the McKenzie corridor, there was no fighting to save any structures, any homes, and certainly not any trees. We don't blame anyone for that, but to ask us to shoulder an additional part of firefighting costs seems a an insult added to an already devastating injury. Furthermore, the cause of our fire wasn't a careless woodland owner, it was a public utility. Again, we are not blaming, simply noting that woodland owners are being asked to shoulder an untenable proportion of a burden that should be shared by all Oregonians.

Again, now is not the time for new taxes. Let the ash settle first. Let the MOU process continue. Let us heal and rebuild and replant. Rather than worrying about how we will pay our taxes or feeling pushed into contemplating conversion of our woodlands to other uses, let woodland owners do what we do best: nurture healthy, resilient forests, provide lumber for homes, jobs for our communities, healthy watersheds and beauty for our state.

In the short and long term, Oregon needs our forests as forests. Help us insure that happens.

I hope that you will bear these thoughts in mind as you consider HB 2379 and other forest tax bills under consideration this session.

Thank you,

Kathryn McMichael
Vida, OR