

**Date:** May 10, 2021

**To:** Chair Nancy Nathanson, Vice-Chairs Pham and Reschke, and Members of the House Committee on Revenue

**From:** Susan Watkins, 13440 SW McCabe Chapel Road, McMinnville, Oregon 97128

**Re:** HB 2357; Opposed

My name is Susan Watkins. I am sorry I am not able to attend the public hearing this afternoon. I offer these written comments in opposition to HB 2357 instead.

I am especially concerned about the changes HB 2357 would make in OFRI, the Oregon Forest Resources Institute. I have worked closely with OFRI, both as a landowner and as an advocate for small forest owners. I served two terms on the Committee for Family Forestlands (CFF), and one year as Committee chair. (The CFF is appointed by the Board of Forestry to advise that Board about matters that affect small forests.) I currently serve on the Board of the Yamhill County Small Woodlands Association chapter.

It seems incredible to me that you would consider drastic changes to OFRI at this time. An audit of past OFRI practices is due in June. The Department of Forestry is in disarray, with the State Forester leaving the end of May and three new members of the Board of Forestry just settling into place.

Many of Oregon's 60,000 small forest owners testified against earlier versions of this bill. Many of them do not share the same interests and objectives as their larger industrial counterparts. I assume the dash-5 amendments setting some of OFRI's "income" aside within the Department of Forestry for small forest owner education is an attempt to buy off these landowners.

But OFRI has the expertise and systems in place to quickly respond to new conditions faced by landowners, whether those conditions are "on the ground" like fire, ice, or climate change or "technical" like new taxes or forest practices rules. Covid-19 demonstrated how rapidly and effectively OFRI can respond to landowner needs; when in-person "tree schools" had to be canceled, OFRI worked with other agencies to set up Tree School Online through *knowyourforest.org*, a platform OFRI provides for the Partnership for Forestry Education and a valuable online resource for small landowners.

It would take years for ODF to develop this kind of nimble and creative expertise.

My husband and I have 45 acres in productive forest and another nine in an oak restoration project. Like many small forest owners, we bought cut-over land. Our oldest forest trees are only 27 years old. We will not live long enough to harvest them.

Most of Oregon's small woodlands are like ours, covering fewer than 50 acres. Yet together small landowners own almost a third of all private forestland in the state. Also like us, many small woodland owners knew little or nothing about forestry when they acquired their land.

Fortunately, OFRI collaborates well with organizations like OSWA that advocate for small landowners by gathering data about forest ownerships, the problems small landowners face, and solutions to those problems.

Managing a healthy forest that contributes to clean air and water and provides recreational opportunities and wildlife habitat in addition to forest products requires extensive knowledge of soils, seed sources, chemicals, equipment, pests, invasives, and other threats to tree health. We are fortunate that OFRI is able to share the knowledge of its many members with the public and with us.

Another serious problem with HB 2357 is that the bill as now written would repurpose the tax dollars that support OFRI's programs. Currently OFRI is set up like any other commodity commission and is funded exclusively through the Forest Products Harvest Tax, which is paid solely by timber growers. OFRI receives NO General Fund dollars.

HB 2357 is little more than a money grab from one set of priorities to another. Forest owners have to agree to be taxed to fund OFRI; no one has asked whether landowners agree to be taxed to fund the programs identified in HB 2357. Those programs are more properly funded by general fund dollars, contributed by all Oregonians as part of the historic public-private alliance that keeps forest land in forests so that we can all benefit.

Please kill this bill.

Thank you.