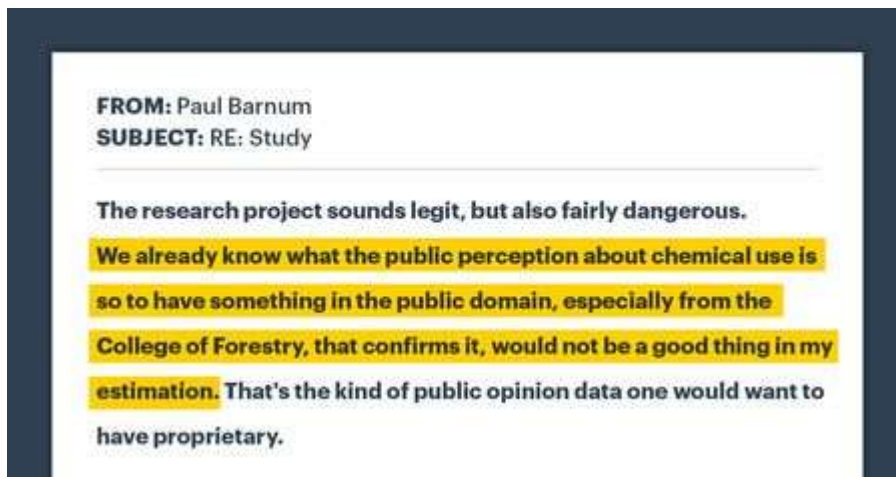


A timber lobbyist called our investigation ‘completely bogus.’ We have the receipts to show it’s not

Updated Mar 08, 2021; Posted Mar 08, 2021



An email from the Oregon Forest Resources Institute.

By [Rob Davis | The Oregonian/OregonLive](#) and Tony Schick | Oregon Public Broadcasting

With the Oregon Legislature taking up bills to overhaul or eliminate the Oregon Forest Resources Institute after a [news investigation last August](#), lobbyists have repeatedly attacked the reporting as incorrect.

The institute is a quasi-governmental agency meant to promote forestry education. The joint investigation by The Oregonian/OregonLive, Oregon Public Broadcasting and ProPublica found that the institute had acted as a de facto lobbying arm of the timber industry, in some cases skirting legal constraints that forbid it from doing so.

At a hearing last Tuesday, a timber lobbyist set aside his prepared remarks and told lawmakers that the investigation was “full of half-truths,” “absolutely inaccurate” and “completely bogus.”

The lobbyist, Jim James, representing the Oregon Small Woodlands Association, told lawmakers we “took a segment of an email, interpreted it for [ourselves] ... and came up with some conclusions that were absolutely inaccurate.”

James, who did not respond to emails seeking comment, expanded on his criticism in [written testimony](#), telling lawmakers, “This so-called news is full of half truths that the authors chose to, without justification, put a biased slant on the information they had collected. To suggest they know everything about OFRI from emails and their own interpretation of the emails is absurd.”

That’s not what we did. And below we’ll share the emails so readers can see for themselves. We provided the emails we cited in our investigation to the people who wrote them. We asked detailed questions. When their responses weren’t clear, we asked them to clarify. This is how journalism works.

The investigation was based on a year of reporting, including interviews with more than 20 people inside and outside the institute, as well as a review of tens of thousands of pages of emails, budgets, publications and other institute records that we obtained under Oregon’s public records law.

James told lawmakers he didn’t understand why the media and others “hate the wood products industry and anything associated with it. It is obvious the media works diligently to exaggerate everything it can to disadvantage the wood products industry.”

A lobbyist for the industry’s main state trade association, the Oregon Forest & Industries Council, made similar claims in [a message rallying supporters to testify](#). “Many, if not all, of the allegations made in the Oregonian/OPB/ProPublica article are false, half-truths, or the information was misconstrued in a way to cast OFRI in a negative light,” wrote the lobbyist, Sara Duncan.

Asked repeatedly for specific examples, Duncan told reporters in a March 5 email: “There is not nearly enough time, nor do I have interest, nor do I think it would be productive to spend my day going line by line identifying mischaracterizations and sensational over-blown conclusions with those who hold the pen.”

In her message to the institute’s supporters, Duncan said one of our “primary assertions” was an incorrect description of the institute as “taxpayer funded.” James also repeated the claim in his testimony.

Our investigation said the institute is “tax-funded” because it is. The institute’s \$4 million annual budget comes from a tax on logging.

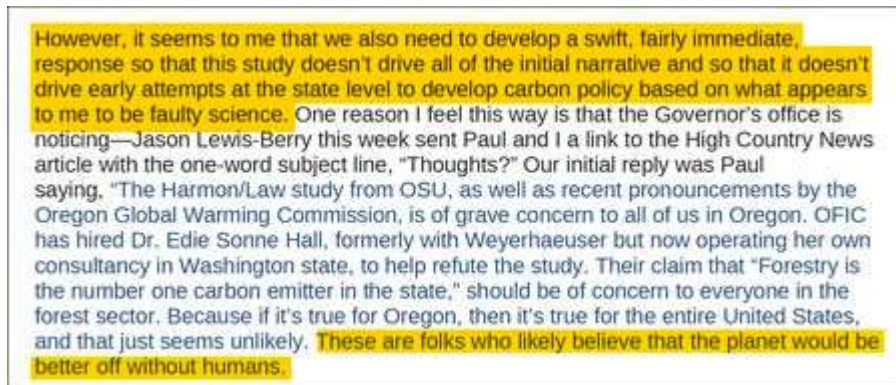
Without providing evidence, lobbyists said we twisted the truth. We didn’t. Here are the investigation’s major findings. And the receipts.

The Institute Attacked Climate Scientists

In 2018, the institute led a coordinated industry effort to undermine two Oregon State University scientists whose research found that logging, once thought to have no negative effect on global warming, was one of the biggest sources of climate pollution in the state.

OFRI's leader at the time, Paul Barnum, told lobbyists in an email that the research was "of grave concern to all of us in Oregon." He protested one researcher's planned radio appearance to her dean and suggested the dean should commission an independent review of the study.

"These are folks who likely believe that the planet would be better off without humans," Barnum wrote of the researchers in one May 2018 email.



However, it seems to me that we also need to develop a swift, fairly immediate, response so that this study doesn't drive all of the initial narrative and so that it doesn't drive early attempts at the state level to develop carbon policy based on what appears to me to be faulty science. One reason I feel this way is that the Governor's office is noticing—Jason Lewis-Berry this week sent Paul and I a link to the High Country News article with the one-word subject line, "Thoughts?" Our initial reply was Paul saying, "The Harmon/Law study from OSU, as well as recent pronouncements by the Oregon Global Warming Commission, is of grave concern to all of us in Oregon. OFIC has hired Dr. Edie Sonne Hall, formerly with Weyerhaeuser but now operating her own consultancy in Washington state, to help refute the study. Their claim that "Forestry is the number one carbon emitter in the state," should be of concern to everyone in the forest sector. Because if it's true for Oregon, then it's true for the entire United States, and that just seems unlikely. These are folks who likely believe that the planet would be better off without humans.

An email from the Oregon Forest Resources Institute.

Another OFRI employee, Timm Locke, offered to help a timber lobbyist draft a counterargument that "those of us in the industry can use." Locke told us in an interview that the line between lobbying and educating at the institute was unclear. He said his pushback against the study wasn't an attempt to sway state policy, but rather to make sure policy was based on sound information.

With statements like those passing muster with the peer reviewers, it calls into question every peer reviewed study ever done by anyone on any topic. It is completely ludicrous to say that wood products begin decaying and releasing carbon into the atmosphere immediately upon being placed in a building. It's equally ludicrous to suggest that these products will be fully decayed within 50 year (2% per year). And to suggest modern wood buildings will be torn down and replaced within 30 years is preposterous.

And to suggest that conclusions drawn based on these assumptions should be used to develop comprehensive carbon reduction policies borders on criminal. At the very least the researchers and the peer reviewers should be called to task to provide credible rationale for making and approving such patently false assumptions. If I had my druthers, their credentials would be revoked. And legitimate scientists ought to feel the same way.

Now that I have that off my chest, I'd like to offer any assistance you might want in drafting a response those of us in the industry can use beginning as soon as possible when media and others make reference to this study.

Please let me know what the next steps might be.

Cheers,

Timm

Timm Locke
Director of Forest Products
locke@ofri.org

An email from the Oregon Forest Resources Institute.

Barnum, who retired as executive director in 2018 but continued working under contract through June 2020, said it was not wrong for him to question the Oregon State University study or other academic research. But he acknowledged that he'd made inappropriate comments, including those that questioned the researchers' motives.

In testimony submitted to lawmakers last week, [Barnum said](#) he took the press coverage "very seriously."

"But let's be honest," he wrote. "If the Legislature eliminated every state agency and department criticized by the Oregonian, there would be far fewer state agencies."

The Institute Attacked Other Forestry Researchers and Professors

OFRI tried to undercut an Oregon State researcher who planned to survey public perception of spraying herbicides in private forests, a project that Barnum in 2017 called "fairly dangerous."

From: Paul Barnum [mailto:barnum@ofri.org]
Sent: Wednesday, July 19, 2017 8:15 AM
To: Sara Duncan <sara@ofri.com>
Cc: Eric Geyer <EricG@rfpco.com>; Mike Cloughesy <Cloughesy@ofri.org>
Subject: Re: Study

Hi Sara,

To my knowledge, we did not receive a similar request. CC'ing Mike C on this just to be sure. The research project sounds legit, but also fairly dangerous. We already know what the public perception about chemical use is, so to have something in the public domain, especially from the College of Forestry, that confirms it, would not be a good thing in my estimation. That's the kind of public opinion data one would want to have proprietary.

That said, if she's going to go ahead with it anyway, we should help her ask good questions.

Not speaking for him, but as a result of producing the webinar series about herbicide use, Mike is up-to-speed on a lot of the current practices. He would make a good contact for this PhD student, in addition to Eric, if Eric wanted to direct her Mike's way.

Paul

Sent from my iPad

An email from the Oregon Forest Resources Institute.

Timber companies raised concerns with OFRI in 2019 after the survey resurfaced and included questions about whether residents trusted private timber companies to provide truthful information about spraying herbicides used to kill vegetation that sprouts in the bare earth of clear-cuts. The survey asked respondents whether they would vote for or against aerial spraying if the issue appeared on the ballot.

OFRI's current director, Erin Isselmann, challenged the validity of the researcher's project with his dean. She suggested in an email to a timber executive that the institute could prepare for the results by spending \$60,000 on its own study. She told us she wasn't attacking science, she just wanted to learn more about the survey. Isselmann, who has been the institute's executive director since July 2018, said she has operated "under the highest ethical standards."

From: Erin Isselemann [mailto:isselemann@OFRI.org]
Sent: Tuesday, June 4, 2019 9:39 AM
To: Keith Williams <kwilliams@stimsonlumber.com>
Cc: Mike Cloughesy <Cloughesy@ofri.org>
Subject: Fwd: OSU College of Forestry - Biennial Report

Keith,

I wanted to share some additional information that Mike and I have been able to gather regarding the survey that you provided to OFRI.

It appears that this survey is part of an overall research project that OSU's Matt Betts is working on with respect to Intensive Forest Management. My understanding based on what I have learned so far is that there is a public opinion component to this study that is focused on 400 residents in coastal locations that were studied as part of Matt's research comparing stands treated with herbicide vs. untreated stands. The public opinion part of the survey is being head up by Mark Needham of OSU's NATURE Lab. I connected with Anthony Davis, who has requested that Mark reach out to me with respect to the survey.

I haven't heard from Mark yet, however I plan to raise the following in our discussion:

OFRI is the state agency in Oregon that is responsible for public opinion research with respect to Forest sector public opinion
Anthony Davis serves on OFRI's Board of Directors as an advisor and as a liaison between OFRI and OSU
OFRI conducts our Values and Beliefs research every four years and welcomes the participation of ODF and OSU
OFRI carefully designs our research so that we received valid and reliable data that is representative of statewide opinion with respect to forest management

I don't know at what stage that this public opinion research is in its completion. I plan to communicate to Matt and to Mark that this public opinion research needs to clearly state that it is representative of public opinion in only those areas where the survey was fielded and only to the extent that the results are valid and reliable. That means that they will need to be able to produce survey results which are representative of the total population in these areas and reflective of the demographics of these areas. If they can't meet acceptable social science benchmarks for survey research, then they will need to be very careful with the results of the survey. If they dip below a certain level, most reputable peer reviewed publications will not accept the results of their survey.

None of this will stop the researchers from promoting their work with the media and in OSU publications. I think we need to be prepared for this outcome and start now to educate policy makers and other influencers about the reliability and validity of survey research.

One thing that I can propose to the OFRI board is a new piece of research that would be devoted to the application of herbicides in the state of Oregon. This would likely cost in the neighborhood of \$60,000 to conduct a thorough and reliable statewide survey with DHM research. Let me know what you think about this idea. I could likely get this done in 2-3 months time. In order to be more inclusive, I would engage both ODF and OSU College of Forestry in the research design.

Regards,
Erin

Sent from my iPad

An email from the Oregon Forest Resources Institute.

In 2017, the institute's then-leader, Barnum, joined industry lobbyists in targeting a University of Oregon journalism professor who produced a video that criticized logging as part of a research project.

Barnum and the lobbyists met with school officials and threatened to pull donor funding. Here's an industry lobbyist's summary of that day:

On May 3, 2017, at 5:13 PM, Sara Duncan <sara@ofic.com> wrote:

All –

I think I've included everyone on this email who has been involved in the email chains regarding the recent 360 degree video "PSA" project between the University of Oregon's Journalism and Communications School and Pacific Rivers, but if I missed someone, please feel free to forward.

This morning a group of us (Travis Joseph, Paul Barnum, Inka Bajandas, and myself) met with Executive Director of the Turnbull Center and the Agora Journalism Center, Regina Lawrence, and Vice Provost of U of O Portland, Jane Gordon for almost two hours.

We got some background on how the project came about. The way I understood it (and Travis, Paul and Inka can correct me if I'm wrong) the Agora Journalism Center is privately funded through donations. We never quite got an explanation on who specifically funds that center or if Pacific Rivers made a donation, but the point was made that it was not public dollars. The Center awarded \$10,000 in "seed money" for what they explained is a research project on the effectiveness of virtual reality as a communications tool. When we expressed confusion about how this could be considered journalism (as there was only one side of the issue presented), Regina explained that SOJC provides education on a number of different programs, including Strategic Communications (euphemism for Public Relations), Advertising and Marketing. The instructors who received the grant money for the project are Journalism and Communication's Assistant Professor Heather Shoenberger, Strategic Communications Master's Program Director Donna Davis and Multimedia Journalism Master's Program Co-Director Wes Pope. So it would seem that it's a joint research project between Strategic Communications and Journalism (which I don't exactly understand how that's appropriate, but that was my understanding.) Regina explained that in the past, Strategic Communications students routinely partner with, normally, non-profits to provide students with "experiential learning." In those instances, the students essentially create a communications plan or re-design a website for a "client" in order to get real life learning instead of just theoretical education. This particular project is the first time they've done a research project like this.

We expressed extreme concern over what appeared to be the University tethering itself to a position on such a politically charged topic. We gave them some background on Pacific Rivers' political activities, including their involvement in recent state-wide initiatives and HB 3226, and the likelihood that they will use this "PSA" to run a statewide ballot campaign. When I said it appeared that PR was using this for message testing, Regina confirmed yes, that was the idea and she thought that was ok because that was the purpose of the research project – to see if VR was an effective tool for delivering a message. They both seemed to really struggle with how the University would dictate which projects were politically "ok" and which weren't. They seemed concerned this would limit academic freedom.

They were strong on two points: this was not the University's position and they didn't think PR was going to own this video product at the end – it was a research project. They also offered that they're always looking for partners and they'd be completely open to a similar partnership with OFRI, AFRC or OFIC.

In the end, I'm not convinced Regina thinks there was anything wrong with the project (although she did concede that PR's Facebook post was "sloppy" and not representative of their relationship). She was pretty defensive of the project. Jane, on the other hand, seemed to understand that this was a problem and seemed to be interested in how they could back-peddle out of this situation without blowing it up. We suggested a number of things: they clarify their relationship with PR and manage expectations with PR staff about what the outcome of this project will be and they write a letter to our three organizations explaining the project and the process for selecting the project, including clarity on where the money comes from. I don't think we got a solid agreement that they would do anything as a result of our meeting, but they did commit to think about next steps and get back to us.

We also made quite clear that our members (many of whom are significant donors) to U of O, were spectacularly offended by this situation, so much so that they are reconsidering future donations if this is how the University approaches Journalism.

I've also followed up with an email to Regina and Jane pointing them to [this post on the Agora Center's website](#) that contradicts what they told us in the meeting: that this is a Strategic Communications research project and not Journalism, and that they don't think the "seed money" stipulated that they produce a PSA. I also expressed confusion about how this could be a Strat Comm project when it appears the class producing the video are Masters students in Multimedia Journalism.

At this point, the ball's in their court to fix this. Paul offered to review a draft of their letter before they officially send it out. We'll let you know if we get any sense that's the direction they're going.

An email from the Oregon Forest Resources Institute.

Despite Prohibitions Against Lobbying, OFRI Kept Tabs on Politicians, Legislation and Ballot Measures

In 2018, OFRI's outgoing and incoming executive directors sat through private industry deliberations about political attack ads that opposed Oregon Gov. Kate Brown's reelection that year. And in 2019, its board discussed rushing a report in an attempt to stop ballot measures that targeted logging, the news organizations found.

Barnum later said they should not have stayed in the private meeting; Isselmann noted that it happened during her first week on the job. The board member who suggested rushing the report, Casey Roscoe, whose company gave more than \$100,000 to the industry campaign against the measures, said she wanted both sides to have the best information available.

Wondering whether a 2017 bill amendment that meant to target the institute was a bait-and-switch, Barnum said of Rep. Paul Holvey, who introduced it, "I don't think the representative is that smart."

From: Kristina McNitt <kristina@ofic.com>
Date: Wednesday, May 24, 2017 at 8:33 AM
To: Paul Barnum <barnum@ofri.org>
Subject: RE: Urgent Need to Contact Members of the House Revenue Committee

You're on the money!

From: Paul Barnum [mailto:barnum@ofri.org]
Sent: Wednesday, May 24, 2017 7:33 AM
To: Kristina McNitt <kristina@ofic.com>
Subject: RE: Urgent Need to Contact Members of the House Revenue Committee

I have the -1s. Makes sense that we can only react to what's printed, even though what's really planned is a bait and switch. I would be inclined to say that was planned, but frankly, I don't think the representative is that smart.

PB

An email from the Oregon Forest Resources Institute.

And when state Sen. Michael Dembrow registered for a tour OFRI helped organize, Barnum told a staffer to keep his eye on Dembrow, a Portland Democrat who'd tried to tighten spraying laws.

Date: Thursday, June 21, 2018 at 9:04 AM
To: Mike Cloughesy <Cloughesy@ofri.org>
Subject: RE: Please give me a call when you are free

Unfortunately, Kathy and I will be leaving about then to meet with the folks at Hacker to talk about a sublease. How about 1:15 p.m.?

My main question is that with pushing the vacation forward, I think I need to bail on the herbicide application workshop. I really want to attend, but if I do I will be digging a deep hole for myself on workload. It's a pretty good list of policymakers, etc., but with Inka, Kyle, Jerry and David all there. I think you'll have enough firepower to have 1:1 conversations with electeds. **You personally need to pay special attention to Sen. Dembrow, who's probably attending only to say that he's schooled himself on the subject of herbicides and still opposes it.** Also, I'm a bit concerned about Scott Dahlman. I've not worked with him before, but I would not want him to be too rah-rah. Might be worth you having a conversation with him prior so that he understands his role.

Let's still talk later today if that works.

Paul

An email from the Oregon Forest Resources Institute.

After Rep. Pam Marsh, an Ashland Democrat, questioned whether the institute's funding should be cut during a 2017 hearing, Barnum told a lobbyist: "I know someone from southern Oregon who might be able to talk to March w/o it getting back to me."

Barnum acknowledged in an interview that he had made inappropriate comments about legislators.

Date: Friday, March 31, 2017 at 3:04 PM
To: Kristina McNitt <kristina@ofic.com>
Subject: RE: harvest tax

Thanks Kristina. **I know someone from southern Oregon who might be able to talk to March w/o it getting back to me.** I'll stream the hearing.

For some good news, here's a link to KGW news' 3-minute coverage of mass timber conference.

<http://www.kgw.com/money/business/innovation-could-lead-to-another-timber-boom-in-oregon/426753469>

PB

From: Kristina McNitt [mailto:kristina@ofic.com]

Sent: Friday, March 31, 2017 1:36 PM

To: Paul Barnum

Subject: harvest tax

Paul,

Got your vmm; the hearing was a cluster, yesterday. In no small part due to the fact that Revenue as much as refused to bring ODF to talk about the fire program to kick it off, which set the platform for a wide range of off-base discussions free of facts. I'd highly recommend an hour-and-half investment of time to stream the whole hearing, which starts with Holvey's bill. OFRI took direct shots from Holvey and the new rep from Ashland, Pam March (don't worry, OFRI was in good company – they are both quite hostile to industry in general). Let's talk on Monday.

Have a good weekend!!

Kristina McNitt

President | Oregon Forest & Industries Council

An email from the Oregon Forest Resources Institute.