



To: Members of the House Committee on Revenue
From: Gregory Monahan, Oregon Chapter Sierra Club
Date: May 11, 2021

RE: Support for HB 2357A – Reform OFRI (redirect funding)

Dear Chair Nathanson, Vice Chairs Pham and Reschke, and members of the House Committee on Revenue:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on HB 2357A. On behalf of its 80,000 members and supporters in Oregon, the Sierra Club advocates for reforming the Oregon Forest Resources Institute (OFRI), including addressing what its funding supports. Please pass HB 2357A out of your committee with a Do Pass recommendation. We are in favor of targeting funding for independent forest science research, small woodlot owners, and climate-wise forest management.

We have long opposed OFRI's use of tax dollars to illegally lobby against reforming Oregon's forest policies. Climate science has upped the stakes. We now know how vitally, even existentially, important it is that Oregon implement laws that protect our forests for their long-undervalued nature-based ecosystem benefits: clean water, wildlife habitat, carbon drawdown and sequestration, soil and stream health, hydrologic function, cooling, spiritual refuge, and well-being. These are forest values Oregonians treasure and overwhelmingly support—and expect our government to codify and strengthen.

We know, for example, that big trees and old growth trees are splendidly efficient at banking carbon as their trunks layer in new growth within their broad girths year after year, and are much more productive in doing so than young trees. We know that tall old growth trees with vast root systems connect to hundreds of other trees via a network of fungi, allowing them to share resources and information. Mother trees are the source of a forest's resilience and renewal in the face of climate change. Breakthrough research reveals complex communications and cooperation among trees. A mother tree can even recognize its own saplings and direct more carbon, nutrients, and water to them if needed, but will also support other neighbor trees in distress. This is forests in their beneficence, millennia after millennia.

OFRI has abused its power. It has time and again undermined efforts to put in place stronger forest protections, instead illegally lobbying against stronger regulations and stifling Oregon State University College of Forestry Department's climate research. OFRI duplicitously participated in a meeting with dark money group Priority Oregon which was developing attack ads against Gov. Brown's policy. OFRI aired media advertising intended to purposely mislead the public about the true status of logging practices and outcomes, in order to suppress opposition to the timber industry's blatantly damaging, self-serving practices.

We support shifting OFRI funding to programs that invest in continued forest health, adaptive management, and climate-related research; that assist small woodland owners; and that stringently

regulate and monitor pesticide and herbicide usage—which is in itself a practice that is detrimental to forest, soil and wildlife health and well-being.

We are dismayed that OFRI, whose board is controlled by the timber industry, currently has no oversight of its revenue or activities. We applaud HB 2357A's provision that will enable half of the revenue going to the Dept. of Forestry "Sound Forestry Practices" subaccount, which will fund needs for:

- 1) Climate science and climate-wise forestry research and practices;
- 2) Enhanced reporting and monitoring for pesticide and herbicide usage in forest operations;
- 3) Adaptive management driven by research and amending forest practices over time with the goal of sustainably nurturing and managing forests.

Additionally, we applaud the bill's provisions that:

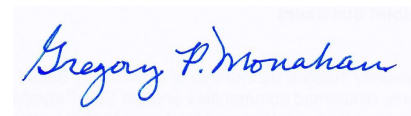
1. Directs additional 17% of the timber tax that currently goes to OFRI be dedicated to support the Committee for Family Forestlands, in order that small woodlot owners will have needed funds to support understanding of forest practices rules, and aid in practicing sustainable forestry;
2. Reforms OFRI by prohibiting "generalized advertising for public education;"
3. Adds a conservation representative and a fish and wildlife expert to the OFRI board.

OFRI has betrayed the trust of Oregonians. Transparency is long overdue. Reform and oversight as set forth in HB 2357A are steps in the right direction to bring our forests to greater sustainable management, and as scientific research reveals wiser practices fundamental to forest health and nurturing, the Legislature must take responsible steps to put them in place. Forest Defense equals Climate Defense.

We cannot allow the timber industry to continue its outsized and undue influence in how Oregon's forests are managed. The people of Oregon understandably demand more confidence that Oregon's forests thrive through science-backed care and management that helps Oregon reach our goals for addressing climate change. We have confidence in the remarkable life-affirming functioning of forest ecosystems themselves.

With the knowledge we now have, the Legislature must recognize and act on the existential mandate to honor and protect Oregon's forests for current and future generations, and for the web of life therein. The Oregon Chapter Sierra Club hereby strongly urges the Oregon Legislature to resoundingly pass HB 2357A.

Sincerely,



Gregory Monahan
Chair, Legislative Committee
Oregon Chapter Sierra Club