

February 23, 2021

Why we oppose HB2379 & HB2598

Dear Chair Witt, Vice Chair Breese Iverson and Committee Members,

We are writing today as small woodland owners voicing our strong opposition to HB2379 and HB2598. Our family operates Whitewater Forests LLC, our primary business is growing commercial timber on forests in Lane and Douglas Counties. Three generations of our family actively participate in our working forests and we share great pride in sustainable management and care of our lands and resources.

Our family pays a considerable amount in property taxes each year towards services for the betterment of our county and to protect from fire. At present rates, the property taxes we pay over a 50-year growing cycle for our timber, compounded at a mere 3% will amount to about \$ 80 per truckload of logs at harvest. Either of the two tax bills being discussed today may more than double this amount.

In the 1990s the formula for taxation on timberlands was revised from an outdated severance tax similarly paid on extraction of minerals to enlightened taxation on the value of forestlands, where timber productivity and growth potential are recognized much the same as Oregon's agricultural lands. During the early 2000s property taxes on forest parcels were increased substantially to maintain the local tax base. Over the same period harvest goals on Oregon's Federal Forests decreased by 86%. Despite bogus claims to the contrary these Federal harvest reductions sapped not only economic vigor but the tax base from much of rural Oregon.

HB2379 and HB2598 are filled with false promises of equity; yet include language attempting to dictate forestry practice and biology using taxation as a prescriptive penalty. The authors of such nonsense clearly have no knowledge of working forests and spin notions that will only serve to bring more hardship to rural Oregon.

Aside from taxation there are many reasons the consequences of HB2379 & HB2598 are bad public policy. Each of these bills is stuffed with numerous convoluted and unrelated proposals detrimental to Oregon's forest community. For brevity sake I will only mention two of the most egregious examples.

Both bills would gut and dismantle a successful, coordinated and cost-effective fire protection program administered by the state in cooperation with private landowners which has effectively managed serious wildfire incidents for decades. In it's place the proposed legislation would transfer authority over emergency wildfire from seasoned local state and private experts in wildfire protection, prevention and response to inexperienced political operatives. This loss of local expertise is unwarranted and sets a dangerous precedent.

Both HB2379 & HB2598 direct a concerted and a particularly vindictive effort to eliminate The Oregon Forest Resources Institute (OFRI). Since its creation in 1991 OFRI, a commodity commission for forest products, has worked honestly and effectively to facilitate educational programs and dialogue concerning Oregon's Forests. Landowner education is a significant role in the OFRI program. During 2019/2020 OFRI sponsored seventy-eight forest related educational events attended by over 6000 landowners. Topics including water quality, carbon storage, harvesting and wildfire prevention were featured subjects.

Sensible public discourse on the future of Oregon's forests, the effect of climate change and concerns over wildfire are valid reasons for continued support of OFRI's valuable work.

Like most Oregonian's we treasure our forest heritage. Sound forestry is critical to maintaining our open spaces. Creeping regulation and over-taxation diminish small woodland owner family's ability for financial return. Ultimately, the result will be more pressure for development. Each of these bills are punitive and arbitrary, and if enacted will discourage small forest ownership to the detriment of all Oregonians. We ask you to oppose and reject HB2379 and HB2598.

Sincerely,

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