

House Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee

My name is Neil Westfall. My family and I own 3,000 acres of timber and ranch land in southwestern Oregon. My family has owned this property for 80 years.

I am opposed to HB 2379 and other bills that propose a new severance tax on harvested timber.

Currently, there are 5 families totaling 20 family members that includes the 5th generation that lives and work full time on this land. We grow and harvest timber, raise cattle and hay on this land. We have harvested timber every year for the last 80 years on our land, we know how much timber we grow and we harvest on a sustainable basis.

Over the last 80 years we have faced and survived many challenges. The ups and downs of markets, increases in operating costs, weather, predators killing our livestock as well as our trees and yes taxes and regulations. We bought our land back because of estate taxes from the Federal Government and the State of Oregon when one of our family members passed away, it cost us 60% of the value. We lived through land use planning rules, endangered species laws, Oregon Forest Practice rules the latest took 160 acres out of our land base, and of course no compensation. That is land my family bought 80 years ago then bought back again at 60 cents on the dollar.

Four generations of our family have lived on this land and supported our community, will the 5th be able to stay if they choose too? Adding additional tax burdens on the portion of our property will likely cause the family to put more emphasis on our ranching business and convert forest to agricultural uses.

House 2379 would impose an unreasonable 5% tax on the value of timber harvested over and above all the taxes already paid now. The return on investment for managing timber and farming, overtime, would be drastically reduced with the addition of this tax. This is revenue needed to reforest after harvest and to invest in keeping the forest healthy until the next rotation would be reduced with this tax. This new tax would influence my ability to reinvest in my forest.

HB 2379 is not in the best interest of our state or our family. We request that you oppose it and any other bills that impose a new severance tax. Thank you for your service to our State and your consideration of my family's request for opposition to these bills.

Neil A. Westfall and family.
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