

Oregon Forests: will divide and conquer win again for large corporations?

Oregonians love their state's natural scenic environment so much they put the mountains, coastline, forests and natural beauty above disadvantages of scarce jobs, poor schools, inclement weather and an inadequate tax system. I'm one of those, rural-born-love-the-land Oregonians. My Dad was a Federal Forest Ranger in Lakeview then Paisley in the 1940's. Logging companies used to be locally owned and operated, providing many jobs in rural areas,

In the 1990's "severance" taxes were charged in addition to low rates of property tax when trees were cut. Without paying severance tax, owners might clearcut then just abandon the property. Now a majority of forests in Oregon are owned by Real Estate Investment Trusts (REIT) or Timber Investment Management Operations (TIMO's) who, like the fabric of our colonization history, care about profits to their shareholders and don't pay corporate tax to the state. And the severance tax has been diminished or eliminated. The public interest research done by The Oregonian and OPB showed that if Oregon's severance tax had not been phased out, companies would have paid an estimated \$3 billion during the recent past. Instead, cities and counties collected less than a third of the former payment, or roughly \$871 million.

While there is some truth that reductions in Federal timber cuts led to job losses in rural areas, the voice of the Industrial timber owners blamed the "spotted owl" instead of their own mechanization to increase their profits. The Oregonian/OPB investigation showed that "half of the 18 counties in Oregon's timber-dominant region lost more money from tax-cuts on private forests than from the reduction of logging on federal lands". Now Oregonians are facing a "false fight" where urban dwellers are pitted against rural people with outrageous allegations such as "urban pet projects" including protection of rural watersheds and money for more fire protection. Even small woodlot owners are told they stand to lose money when only acreages of 3000 and larger would be included in the citizens initiative LC. Harvesting after longer cycles of growth would be rewarded by progressively cutting tax rates on all lands. And science tells us that growing trees for longer periods would contribute importantly to carbon sequestration.

In my experience, since the death of George Floyd, there is more compassion than ever for All Oregonians, including rural residents, and heartfelt desire for the survival of their counties. The entire focus of the propaganda fed by voices from Big Timber interests such as OFRI, is on costs to the land owners whereas over 40% of the coastal range is now owned by profiteers, not small owners who live on the land.

In hope you will "see through the 'hype' and do what is 'right' to bring fairness back into taxation in Oregon's forests by implementing a severance tax, my preference is the Citizen Initiated LC because it was written by the people involved on the ground.