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Sirs:

I am alarmed to hear there is talk about eliminating the Oregon Forest Resources Institute! This is terribly short-sighted and I am writing to urge a NO vote on HB 2357.

As a lifelong forester (now retired), I find we are becoming an increasingly urbanized society and we are losing our connection to the natural world. For example, in working with kids (and oftentimes, adults), I find that, while they may have learned about the food chain, they seem surprised to learn that EVERYTHING they eat can be traced back to the soil! Similarly, all the energy their food gives them can be traced, through photosynthesis, to the sun. With that lack of basic knowledge, an uninformed citizenry cannot make sound natural resource decisions.

The educational programs the Oregon Forest Resources Institute provides or supports are becoming increasingly important. Given that most people now live in urban areas and the power of their vote, the urban voter can impose their values on the rural producer of the very food and fiber the urbanite depends on. This voting power can have a detrimental effect on the rural producer of that food and fiber. Thus, an informed urban voter is becoming increasingly important.

One organization OFRI supports is the Eugene-based Forests Today & Forever. FT&F is a small forestry education non-profit. OFRI supports FT&F and around 3,000 K-12 Lane County students it serves yearly through its field-based, experiential programs. I am a co-author of FT&F's signature program – Forest Field Day – and served several years on FT&F's board of directors.

Forest Field Days primarily serves middle school students where 3,000 students (mostly city kids) get to walk a forest trail, breathe fresh forest air, see a stream, and learn from professionals who range from wildlife biologists to foresters to recreation specialists. They get to interact with people who use math and science in their daily lives. This program supports educational content standards while giving students an important outdoor learning experience. A variety of schools in the Eugene, Bethel, Springfield, and Pleasant Hill districts participate in this program as do a number of rural and private schools.

Another project OFRI supports is Talk About Trees. TAT goes into the schools and reaches over 100,000 elementary students every year!

OFRI provides bus reimbursement to schools so that students can visit the forest and explore the many benefits the forest provides to all Oregonians. Given tight school budgets these days, it is safe to say

that without the support of OFRI's bus reimbursements, schools could not participate in Forest Field Day, outdoor schools, field trips, as well as other important (sometimes life-changing) experiences.

About twenty years ago, there were around two dozen high schools with strong forestry programs. After Measure 5, schools cut most of these programs so that, eight years ago, there were only a half dozen of these programs left. Because so much of these programs were field-based, these provided a reason for some kids to stay in school and get their diplomas. OFRI worked closely with the Or. Dept. of Education and there are now around thirty high schools with a certified natural resource program. There are several other high schools working toward that certification. **I recently saw some ODE data that showed the graduation rates of students across ALL demographics who participated in career-related programs in high school is 10-20% greater than average – OFRI is playing a huge role in these improved graduation rates!!**

OFRI has a variety of important learning publications and training workshops to support classroom teachers from all across Oregon. The literature and OFRI-sponsored teacher workshops are science-based and align with grade level learning objectives. Teachers love these resources and use them to complement the learning experiences and activities they give their students.

So far, I've talked about schools and kids but OFRI does so much more! OFRI has had several advertising campaigns to help teach Oregonians about forests and forestry; many of these are aimed at people new to Oregon and to the urban resident. They have worked with landowners and loggers to help them better manage the forest.

Why the state would consider abolishing OFRI is beyond me! This is especially perplexing given that the agency costs the state nothing; to support OFRI, forest landowners tax themselves through timber harvests to fund the agency. *[I fully understand there are some Oregonians who oppose forestry and want to see OFRI go away.]*

I urge you to vote no on this foolish and very short-sighted bill. Students, forest landowners, and all other Oregonians benefit from OFRI's programs.

Thank you.

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