

2/25/21

Chair Witt and Members of House Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee,

RE: No new timber taxes – no on HB2379

I'm writing to encourage you to vote NO on HB 2379 that raises taxes on forestland owners. I am a forester in Corvallis and am deeply concerned that these bills are bad for forests and bad for Oregon.

Over the last 23 years, I have worked with numerous small woodland owners and private forestland owners who are devoted to developing and maintaining healthy forests that provide wood, clean water and air, wildlife habitat, and recreation on their forestland. While they wait decades to see a financial return on their investment in growing trees, they are proud to contribute these benefits to all Oregonians. Forestland owners already pay federal and state taxes at the time of harvest, harvest tax, fire assessments, lot taxes, property taxes and the CAT tax. These forestlands are uninsurable assets when it comes to fire and weather/storm related damage. Many forestland owners have experienced severe fire and ice damage in the last six months. It seems unreasonable to keep piling on additional taxes for forestland owners who take great risk and responsibility in growing maintaining healthy forests.

Now is the worst possible time for a new timber tax. Rural communities cannot afford another tax. Timber jobs and businesses are the economic backbone of rural Oregon – the forest sector provides over 60,000 family wage jobs in Oregon, mostly in rural communities. In 2020, these communities have endured massive layoffs and the worst wildfires in Oregon history and are struggling to recover and rebuild. A new tax on timber will eliminate jobs and businesses in rural communities that are already suffering multiple extreme hardships. 64% of Oregonians oppose new taxes.

Our focus should remain on restoring hundreds of thousands of acres of burned forests back to healthy, thriving forests that prevent future fires, protect water quality, and capture and store carbon – NOT taxing the very people doing that work.

Finally, keeping forests as forests is in the best interest of all Oregonians, and our current tax and land use systems work together to encourage forestland is maintained in Oregon and not lost to conversion like has happened in our neighboring states. Since 1907, Oregon has maintained 94% of its forestland area, whereas Washington and California have lost over 15% of their forestland to development. Reinstating a severance tax encourages conversion of forestland to other uses (residential, industrial, agricultural) that do not provide environmental benefits like carbon capture and storage, wildlife habitat, clean water, and recreation. Severance taxes are for "severed resources" like coal and crude oil, not a crop that is planted and cultivated over time. State law requires harvested timber be replanted – on average four trees are planted for every one that is harvested. I urge you to please vote no on this detrimental bill. Piling on new taxes to the communities devastated by the wildfires who are trying to recover and do restoration work will not help to return our forests to the healthy and green status that all Oregonians wish to see.

Thank you,

Jennifer Beathe