

I am opposing the bill that eliminates OFRI funding. I contract with Talk About Trees (TAT), and have since 1999. TAT receives 2/3 of its funding through grants to OWIT (Sponsor of TAT) from OFRI, so I have been part of the educational program that OFRI has funded for more than the past 2 decades. I understand that because I technically receive funding, round and about through OFRI, that this fact may dilute my position, but I also want to share my experiences of implementing forest education dollars in the community long term.

I have been traveling around Douglas and Josephine County for the past 2+ decades, hauling bins of pieces of the forest to schools and communities. This is the most fun job I have ever had because everyone loves to talk about trees. The TAT program teaches neutral, hands-on learning about Tree ID, Tree health & Tree products. I love this job because it is not political, and I work very hard to present science-based information and not touch upon political issues, only to acknowledge that they exist.

I see about 10,000 students and many thousands of adults that are working with them every year, as well as families at events, learning with their children. With this contact, I have been able to share the love of trees, their complicated beauty, share the wonder of their diversity, share the marvel at our interdependence and symbiotic relationship with them, and share the knowledge we have about trees. There is so much to know about trees, I often marvel how I learn new things every week about trees, and it seems there is always more to learn, much of which I learn from our audience. Because of this, my presence as a Talk About Trees Facilitator initiates knowledge sharing sessions amongst participants, which seems valuable for learning and only good for the future of trees. There are many schools that I have been to throughout the years that point out to me that the school has no science curriculum, and that the TAT visits to the classroom are the only science kids get. This means, in some places in Oregon, the OFRI education dollars are providing the only science some rural elementary kids are getting. YIKES. This is so important. Especially now during the pandemic, we have been moving our program online, and again, many teachers have mentioned that the only science their online school kids have access to at this time is the presentations about trees that I am giving through TAT (free to the schools, thanks to OFRI).

Another underserved group I have been able to bring forestry education to is the homeschool community. They often do not get access to the same resources as brick & mortar school kids do, but the nature and flexibility of the TAT program enables me to bring the forest to where they are at. The educational publications (OFRI offers for free and mails for free) have also been a tremendous resource for home school parents and their students, especially since they may have limited access to resources otherwise.

I believe our relationship with trees holds keys to our future and I have been privileged to spend the past few decades sharing the enthusiasm for trees that all Oregonians seem to have and also love to share. The TAT program, funded by OFRI helps to keep the conversation about trees generated and continue among the communities around us and the children in particular. Because of this, I oppose the ending of OFRI at the time.

Thank you for your consideration.