

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

RE: HB2357 (Opposed)

As a professional forester, natural resource educator, and parent of public elementary school students in Oregon, I oppose HB 2357.

As a forest educator, I have stood in front of an elementary student from a Title I school and listened as they told me this was the first time they had ever visited a forest. All Oregon children should have the opportunity to go to the forest. OFRI makes it possible. OFRI has paid for the bus costs for thousands of students in schools that are not able to afford field trips. The forest is a fantastic classroom and OFRI's bus program brings equity to low-income elementary schools by offering this program throughout Oregon.

As a parent of elementary age children, I have observed the OFRI sponsored Talk About Trees program at several grade levels. In kindergarten, the educator teaches about big cones like the sugar pine and small cones from the Hemlock. In second grade, classes learn about paper making and students craft their own designs. In third grade, students take a field trip to Peavy Arboretum and learn about the trees that grow on the edge of the Willamette Valley. In fourth grade, students visit an actively managed forest where they learn that different age forests offer different habitats for wildlife. These short, but repeated forest education touches, make lasting impressions about the wonders of Oregon's forests. Every child in Oregon deserves to learn about forests. OFRI makes it possible. Even during COVID times, the expertise and creativity of the OFRI staff has resulted in educational, creative, and engaging virtual content for classrooms.

In 23 years as a forester, I have been both a student and an educator in dozens of forest landowner education trainings organized by OFRI. From plants and wildlife, to timber, carbon and climate change, OFRI fulfills its mission by educating Oregonians about a wide variety of forest topics.

Both natural resource professionals and private landowners benefit from the collaborative, science-based education facilitated by OFRI. OFRI is known to bring a wide range of forestry experts into their education programs. They include wildlife biologists, hydrologists, and soil scientists, to name a few.

As a natural resource educator, I have seen firsthand the value OFRI brings to natural resource education in the K-12 education system. A few years ago, I was a student in an OFRI training for educators that was based on the BEETLES (Better Environmental Education, Teaching, Learning & Expertise Sharing) program. This Science for Teachers and Field Instructors program is housed in the Lawrence Hall of Science as part of the University of California at Berkeley. All the BEETLES resources are based on current research and understandings about how people learn and are tested by dozens of programs in diverse settings all over the country. The educators at OFRI took the training and brought it back to Oregon to guide both urban and rural Oregon natural resource field instructors on how to help "students learn to think like scientists, while falling in love with the natural world in the process." Isn't this exactly what we want for our children?

OFRI's expertise lies in correlating forestry and natural resource materials to Oregon Department of Education statewide learning standards. At the high school level, collaboration between OFRI and the Oregon Department of Education has led to 37 high schools offering CTE recognized Programs of Study in Natural Resources and Forestry. There are 157 high schools in Oregon providing natural resource and forestry education to Oregon high school students. Parents say that forestry is their high schoolers favorite course. OFRI is making this happen and is showing our future workforce worthy career options. The Oregon Department of Education reports a high school graduation rate for CTE students at over 90%. This is higher than the non-CTE student graduation rate.

To eliminate OFRI would be wrong. OFRI successfully fulfills its mission in a wide variety of ways to the benefit of all Oregonians.

Jennifer Beathe
Benton County, Oregon