

Southern Oregon Climate Action Now

SOCAN

Confronting Climate Change

<https://socan.eco>

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Representative Witt and

Members of the House Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee:

I write on behalf of the over 1500 rural Southern Oregonians who are Southern Oregon Climate Action Now (SOCAN) regarding HB2357. After reviewing the bills proposed for the 2021 session, and in recognition of the tremendous role our state forests could play in carbon sequestration if not subjected to the extractive whims and obfuscations of the timber industry, this is one of the bills SOCAN decided to support.

According to the Oregon Forest Resources Institute website (<https://oregonforests.org/about-ofri>):

“Oregon’s forests are vast – and so too are the issues and challenges that impact their continued health and productivity. In 1991, the Oregon Legislature created the Oregon Forest Resources Institute (OFRI) to **enhance collaboration** among forest scientists, public agencies, community organizations, conservation groups and forest landowners; to provide objective information about responsible forest management; and to encourage environmentally sound forest practices through training and other educational programs. [boldface mine]

“OFRI mission

“The Oregon Forest Resources Institute is dedicated to advancing public understanding of forests, forest management and forest products, and encouraging sustainable forestry through landowner education.”

Meanwhile, according to the OFRI website statement about the Board

(<https://oregonforests.org/people>), it is appointed by the state forester and should be comprised of:

Class 1: producers of 20 million board feet per year or less

Class 2: producers of at least 20 million per year, but less than 100 million board feet

Class 3: producers of 100 million board feet per year or more

Small woodland owners: forest landowners who own between 100 and 2,000 acres of forestland and who have no direct financial interest in any forest products processing activity. This makes it very clear that there is no possible manner by which the stated stakeholders other than forest landowners would be represented on that Board. <https://oregonforests.org/people>

While OFRI touts its recognition of global warming and the climate change consequences, and acknowledges the role that carbon sequestration in our forests can play in addressing the problem (<https://oregonforests.org/Carbon>), rather than embracing and responding responsibly to studies that reveal the extent to which timber harvest contributes to the statewide emission of greenhouse gases (exceeding that of the worst sector responsible for regulated emissions - namely Transportation), OFRI resists and obfuscates.

A moment of reflection on the discrepancy between the composition of the Board and the stated mission indicates clearly that there exists a gross misalignment between the statement of purpose and a Board which represents and serves only the extractive industries. Indeed, its Board, by prescription, comprises absolutely no forest scientists, and no public agency, community organization, or conservation group representatives. It is clear that, with such a Board, OFRI cannot possibly serve the goals that its website claims for itself. While it is unknown how much involvement the Board has in day-to-day operations, this mismatch suggests that any educational materials developed by OFRI will likely be seriously compromised by a one-dimensional timber extraction perspective.

There can be small wonder, then, that an investigative analysis of the actions of OFRI revealed that this "...tax-funded agency created to educate people about forestry has acted as a public-relations agency and lobbying arm for Oregon's timber industry, in some cases skirting legal constraints that forbid it from doing so (Davis and Schick, 2020 <https://www.propublica.org/article/what-happened-when-a-public-institute-became-a-de-facto-lobbying-arm-of-the-timber-industry>)." Given this exhaustive discussion contained therein, we could add little by way of clarification of the concerns we have regarding OFRI. No counter to this informative assessment of the extent to which OFRI acts on behalf of timber industries has since appeared.

It seems clear that unless it wishes to ignore this excellent investigative reporting and continue the error, the legislature has little option but to curtail OFRI. It is perfectly legitimate for an institute to serve the timber industry, however, such an entity should be funded by that industry - not Oregon taxpayers. Many taxpayers identify with other constituencies than the timber extractive sector and seek other goals for our forests than timber extraction.

In 1991, most of us knew little about the dangers of global warming nor the solutions to this developing existential crisis. We now know better. State funding should reflect our increasing knowledge and changing imperatives and should be assigned to managing our forests for health and carbon sequestration, not extraction.

For these reasons, Southern Oregon Climate Action Now supports HB2357.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Alan Journet". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Alan Journet Ph.D.

<https://olis.oregonlegislature.gov/liz/2021R1/Testimony/HAGNR>