



Oppose HB 3019 - Oregon Forest Resources Institute

Our coalition opposes HB 3019. The forest products industry is one of the state's most significant economic contributors and is the largest supplier of dimensional lumber and plywood in the nation. This industry serves as a foundation for many rural communities, and provides more than 60,000 family-wage jobs, creating compounding benefits to Oregon's rural communities.

The Oregon Forest Resources Institute was formed in 1991 by the Oregon Legislature to educate the public and forest owners about forest practices. Legislators identified the importance of the forest products industry and, according to ORS 526.605, recognized that, "[t]he welfare of the state is [...] largely dependent on the health and vigor of the forest products industry." This is just as accurate today as it was in 1991.

Given the workforce shortage at the state and national levels, particularly for natural resource industries, it is critical to support efforts to expose, educate, and provide pathways for individuals to enter the workforce. OFRI has a profound impact on educating youth and providing resources for teacher educators, inspiring the next generation to pursue educational pathways and careers in forestry, STEM, conservation, and green workforce jobs.

Annually, OFRI funds K-12 classroom and field-forest education programs, with about 700 teachers participating in OFRI's forestry education workshops, reaching approximately 100,000 students. For some students, this is their first exposure to experiential based education and connection to the outdoors. Last year, for the first time since 2019, 140 students in the fourth to sixth grade visited the Rediscovery Forest at the Oregon Garden Natural Resources Education Program to attend Oregon Envirothon.

Forests Today & Forever has coordinated the Forest Field Days program since 1995, and has hosted over 50,000 students to local tree farms. This program is not possible without the bussing reimbursement that OFRI provides. During the 2021-2022 school year, 1,178 middle school students participated in the Forest Field Days program..

In that same year, the Talk About Trees program, which is dependent on funding from OFRI, had a reach of over 41,000 students and has seen over 3.5 million participants since its inception in 1991. It would be devastating to pull resources from our educational system, students, and teachers at a time when they need as much support as possible, and when we need to be refocusing our efforts on workforce development.

OFRI also plays a key role in educating the forest products sector about new research, innovative techniques, and time-sensitive law and regulation changes. Particularly for Oregon's 79,000 small woodland owners who do not have a staff of professional foresters, OFRI is a critical conveyer of information about new forest protection laws created by the new Private Forest Accord. Oregon's small family forest owners rely on OFRI's landowner education program and critical literature on sustainable forest practices, wildlife protections, and forest law. Eliminating

or reducing OFRI's landowner education program will leave tens of thousands of small woodland owners without access to important information on changing regulations and evolving science.

One of OFRI's strengths is its long history of effective outreach with Oregon's small woodland owners. Annually, OFRI hosts or convenes over 6,000 landowner education events, including conferences, field tours, and workshops. It takes time and experience to build trusted relationships with communities, and state regulatory agencies like ODF do not have the capacity to achieve this level of trust, connection, and effective engagement with woodland owners.

OFRI should continue to serve its statutory core function, which is to "*Increase public understanding of the practice of forestry and the use and benefits of forest products.*" Upwards of 50% of OFRI's funding is used to provide education for the general public. Reducing their funding and ability to produce educational materials makes it virtually impossible to fulfill their statutory requirement.

Our coalition believes that Oregon's forest products industry, like other key production sectors of Oregon, benefits from a commodity commission. OFRI serves as a Commodity Commission for the forest products industry and is not very different from other commissions. Oregon Commodity Commissions are formed for producers, governed by producers, and funded by producers. OFRI receives NO General Fund dollars and is exclusively financed through the Forest Products Harvest Tax, a volumetric tax on harvested timber paid only by timber producers.

Our coalition recognizes OFRI's irreplaceable value to the forest products sectors and the broader public. OFRI has performed as intended as has already addressed all of the recommendations identified in the recent state audit.

We ask that you oppose HB 3019 and allow OFRI to continue providing forestry education to the public and forest owners, consistent with its statutory requirements.

Oregon Cattlemen's Association

Oregon Dairy Farmers Association

Oregonians for Food & Shelter

Oregon Women for Agriculture

Weyerhaeuser