

February 28, 2024

We strongly Oppose SB1593

Good day Chair Meek and Committee Members,

Our family is engaged in small forest ownership managing certified forest lands in Lane and Douglas Counties. We are writing today as private citizens who care deeply about our forests and surrounding community. Whitewater Forests, our family-owned business, was recognized in 2019 as the Oregon Tree Farmers of the year. We were noted for our sustainable forest practices and community involvement.

SB1593 is bad legislation that will harm small forest owners in Oregon.

It will eliminate funds for Oregon Forest Research Institute. OFRI is a credible and reliable source of information on sustainable forestry practices, highly valued by small forest owners. OFRI is closely coordinating with the Oregon Department of Forestry to educate and explain technical details on the Private Forestry Accord to small forest owners. No other organization is engaged in this role. OFRI is a timely and crucial source of information on wildfire mitigation for rural forest owners.

SB1593's purported purpose is for fire protection funding. However, the bill specifically allows counties to spend the forest tax money as they see fit rather than for fire protection. It also siphons off 25% of receipts to the State Fire Marshall office who has nothing to do with protecting timberland.

SB1593 eliminates OFPLF funding. ODF fire protection is nationally recognized as a model of success and efficiency for wildfire response and control. This "meddling" will handicap the funding process and damage a functioning and vital system.

SB1593 forces a new tax on small forest owners that will be many times higher than what we presently pay. Severance tax is an outmoded idea that encourages the perverse incentive to grow lower value short rotation trees. It also includes the mistaken notion of taxing our costs of production. This amounts to layering of taxes that further discourages continued use of forestland for growing forests.

SB1593 puts the Oregon government in the business of favoring FSC certification over other programs. There are three certifications presently available in Oregon. Our forestland is certified under American Tree Farm. There is no evidence that FSC is superior to our certification program. FSC is not even registered as an entity in Oregon! We urge forest owners to enlist the certification that assists them with their objectives. Oregon State Government should not be giving preferential treatment favoring one over another.

Lastly, the Amendment is inappropriate as the bill itself. The amendment is simply an anti-forestry study posing a host of biased questions seeking intended validation of SB1593. The panel selected includes a number of parties that have “conflict of interest” from the financial benefit of this proposed taxation.

Another horrendous public policy gaffe is embedded in the amendment. How can you possibly justify granting Federal Forests a taxation discount over private forest owners? Surely you are aware the vast majority of Oregon wildfire acreage each year burns our National Forest lands. The lack of USFS active management results in tinder box conditions awaiting a lightning strike.

Each summer we breathe smoky air and face threat to our neighboring lands because of this forest malfeasance.

SB1593 is faulty public policy and should be defeated; such anti-forestry activism that is resurrected each session should be permanently sidelined in favor of seeking real long-term solutions for Oregon’s forest health and wildfire concerns.

Sincerely from a small forest owning family,

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