

Senator Mark Meek, Chairman  
Senate Revenue and Finance Committee

Senator Meek and Members of the Committee:

My name is Kate McMichael and I offer this written testimony in strong opposition to SB 1593. My wife and I are small woodland owners in Lane County. Our property in Vida burned in the Holiday Farm Fire in 2020.

Offering this testimony feels a bit like being caught in a forestry version of *Groundhog Day*: we keep re-treading the same path, year after year, responding to the same, frequently inflammatory and skewed anti-forestry talking points.

Amidst the multiple issues woodland owners might have with this bill, as I have other tasks to accomplish both to help my burned woodland return to health and resilience *and* to make good on myriad other woodland community commitments, I am limiting my testimony to raising four key areas of concern: (1) the elimination of OFRI at a time it is more vital than ever to small woodland owners; (2) the disproportionate taxing of forest properties for firefighting costs; (3) the constant mischaracterization of forest management as detrimental to water quality; and (4) the prioritization of FSC over other certification programs.

1. I have testified about the importance of OFRI in our woodland owning journey for the past several years—all public record, so easily located—as are accounts of our as history as conservation-leaning, wilderness-loving backpackers who poured our retirement savings into buying a forest property with the goal of sequestering and storing carbon, only to witness it literally go up in smoke in 2020. In short, OFRI was and continues to be an invaluable resource for us, as well as for all woodland owners who want to manage their forests sustainably, following both good forest science AND the protection laws for forests in Oregon. It is the latter that makes any thought of robbing OFRI of funding at this moment—within the first two months of a new and confusing iteration of the Forest Practices Act going in effect, well, flabbergasting. ODF staff and small woodland owners alike are counting the minutes until the new Illustrated Manual is printed and available. OFRI is an indispensable partner for multiple woodland owner educational partnerships and opportunities—from the Partnership for Forestry Education to OSU Extension to local chapters of Oregon Small Woodlands Association. I fail to see how robbing small woodland owners of this vital avenue of assistance benefits anyone—Oregon's forests least of all.

2. As someone surrounded by the remnants of catastrophic fire on a daily basis, I am well aware of fire—and fire costs. As someone who lives on our woodland—so that we can better care for and accompany it back to some semblance of its pre-fire vitality, I am willing—to a reasonable extent—to share increased costs of firefighting. That said, the fires that have surrounded our property and filled our summers with anxiety and smoke over the past four summers (note: *since* 2020) have been largely on federal forests—not well managed (if managed at all), not initially attacked so that they grew from a manageable size to tens of thousands of acres. If I knew our tax dollars on our improved lot would go to ODF and ODF would have the additional resources and legal ability to actually initially attack and fight fires as they do so well no matter where in Oregon they started, then I might be more willing to pay more. As it is, this legislation sends significant money to the Fire Marshall's office—who doesn't have protecting forestland in its mandate—and doesn't even require counties to use the monies for firefighting. The (yet again) disproportionate tax burden on woodland owners (with a new focus on woodland owners who live on their properties) seems to have missed that we are more likely to be the *victims* of fire than the cause. Perhaps it would serve all Oregonians better if we ALL shared in the cost of fire-fighting—especially since, sorry-not sorry

for the repetition, it is, by and large, members of the public rather than woodland owners who start the majority of non-lightning caused fires.

3. Using just my own watershed—the McKenzie—which provides water to the Eugene-Springfield metro area, I find myself baffled about the mischaracterization of the impact of working lands on water quality. Studies done by our local utility found that the water that runs through the forested part of the McKenzie corridor does not become polluted until it reaches the suburban edges. Ironically, caffeine and medications are the key culprits—not the highly regulated, carefully applied chemicals that are often raised up as a scapegoat for water issues.

4. Our property is certified under the Oregon Tree Farm System—and we are proud of that certification, both the work that went into attaining it and the international standards of sustainability and accountability that it signifies. There is nothing wrong with FSC certification, but it is not geared toward the small woodland owner. The problem is not its stringency; the problem is the expense involved in getting it. Most small woodland owners are not independently wealthy, so every penny counts—and pennies that go toward forest care and forest health rather than an expensive certification program—well, that seems a no-brainer. That is especially true since there is an alternative: the Oregon Tree Farm System (part of the American Tree Farm System) which is FREE to small landowners. Yes, they need to put in the time—and perhaps some expense—into developing a qualified management plan, but OTFS is there to provide the support of trained foresters to help landowners through the process—and then to stay in compliance as well. To repeat: OTFS provides third-party verified, internationally approved standards of sustainability at a cost small woodland owners—small woodland owners facing new and higher taxes every year, just for wanting to protect their bit of Oregon's forests—can actually afford. This does not make it a lesser program; it makes it one that is accessible.

Finally, as I (as both of us) have offered before: any of you in the Legislature are welcome to visit my wife and me on our woodland, to meet some of the people who will be—literally—impacted by decisions that you make, about this bill and others. We love our woodland, even in its fire-battered and -bruised state, and we love welcoming people to visit it, to meet our trees, to see what we have done to care for it/them, to see what actual woodland owners—not the caricatures of rapacious forest destroyers that are so much easier to despise—are really like. No one has yet taken us up on the offer, but still it is there for the taking.

Finally, finally, I reiterate my opposition to SB 1593. Please let it die. Thank you for the opportunity to provide this testimony.

Kate McMichael  
Elk Ridge Tree Farm  
OTFS Certified  
Vida, OR