



Council of Forest Trust Land Counties

1212 Court St. NE | Salem, Oregon 97301

Co-Chair Helm, Co-Chair Owens, Vice Chair Finger McDonald, members of the committee. For the record, my name is Branden Pursinger and I am here today in my capacity as the Executive Director for the Council of Forest Trust Land Counties.

Before we begin discussing HB 3103-1, I thought it would be helpful for the committee to understand why the Trust Land Counties are in support of sustainable harvesting in the state forests.

During the 1930s and 40s, devastating fires laid waste to thousands of acres of timberland, which had previously been abandoned and placed in county ownership. In December of 1936, the State Planning Board sent a report to Governor Charles Henry Martin that over 1.7 million acres of timber and grazing lands were in county ownership through tax foreclosures; and by 1939, Governor Charles Sprague saw that figure rise to 2,000,000 acres.

These lands were held in fee by the counties, and because of this, the land did not generate any property taxes. County governments had two options, they could sell the land and place them back on the tax rolls, running the risk of future foreclosures and being in the same position they were in, or they could keep the land as they were. Local governments, dependent upon property taxes for revenues, were struggling to decide what to do.

Beginning in the 1939 Legislative Session, and following in subsequent sessions through the 40s, the Legislature in partnership with the Counties, enacted a series of laws which provided a third option for the timber land, these laws became The State Forest statutes ORS Chapter 530. The lands would be held in trust by the Board of Forestry, under a contract agreement with the counties. The contract was to share the revenues generated from harvesting the lands. A portion of the revenues would remain with the Department of Forestry to cover the costs of managing the lands and the rest would be returned to the counties that deeded the lands to the state.

State Forester Ed Schroeder began conversations in the 1970s with county officials suggesting a need for a regularly constituted group of county individuals to meet with the Department of Forestry on an ongoing basis. Conversations were also had



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with Governor Tom McCall and at the annual Conference for the Association of Oregon Counties (AOC) in November of 1978, Schroeder again broached the subject with county leaders. He emphasized that a close working relationship between the 15 counties and his department would be of benefit to both. The first meeting between the counties and the Department was held on December 28, 1978.

The 15 counties that deeded their lands to the state am began these regular meetings with the Department were: Tillamook, Clatsop, Washington, Columbia, Clackamas, Benton, Lincoln, Marion, Linn, Polk, Lane, Douglas, Coos, Josephine, and Klamath.

In 1979, State Forester Schroeder found the estimated revenues annually from the lands would soon bring in between \$75m and \$100m. Revenues from these Trust lands would be shared with the agreement being found in ORS 530.110 - counties and the state have an agreed split of 63.75% of the revenue generated goes to the counties – who then share the revenues with special districts and K-12, and the remaining 37.25% revenues generated remains with ODF.

That regularly constituted organization of counties remains today and it is the Council of Forest Trust Land Counties.

The mission of CFTLC is to Protect the trust and contractual relationship between the forest trust land counties and the state of Oregon, Support sound active management of county forest trust lands, and protect the flow of revenues from county forest trust lands for essential local public services.

CFTLC is here in support of House Bill 3103 -1.

House Bill 3103 and the -1 amendment attempts to provide a level of certainty in the state forest harvest that is not currently known every year. Counties deeded these lands to the state for long term management known as Greatest Permanent Value. Nothing in this bill would impact the Departments ability to manage the forest. The bill states in Section 1 before the calculation is run, the Forest Practices Act, any Administrative Rule, as well as any Habitat Conservation Plan must be factored in before the sustainable harvest amount is generated.



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The bill does allow for the department to adjust this harvest amount due to catastrophic wildfire or large scale wind event, but it requires the State Forester to calculate a sustainable amount every 10 years, and manage these working forests to that number.

The Trust Land Counties are in support of this bill for the simple reason that it provides a level of certainty to what has become a very fluctuating process over the years. The Department has 15 counties where state forest harvesting could occur. The Department gets to decide when to harvest, where to harvest, and how much to sell the contracts for. The counties are then left year after year wondering if they will have the revenue they need let alone the other special districts and schools, while also wondering exactly how much will be allocated to them.

15 Counties rely on these timber harvest revenues for their annual operating budgets. Special Districts rely on this harvest revenue to stay afloat and school districts in the Trust Counties rely on this harvest revenue to provide the level of service our kids require.

The Council of Forest Trust Land Counties very greatly appreciates the opportunity to discuss this bill and why we are in support of a commonsense, good governance, transparent process approach in the management of our forests. These forests were deeded to the state for management and to be working forests, that was the agreement when the state took over these lands. HB 3103-1 allows these working forests to remain working forests while at the same time providing the certainty in county budgeting year after year.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify and I will turn it over to my fellow panelists to walk through what the bill does and does not do.