



Oregon

Tina Kotek, Governor

Department of State Lands

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State Land Board

Joint Committee on Ways and Means Subcommittee on Natural Resources
Oregon State Capitol
900 Court St. NE Salem, OR 97301

Tina Kotek
Governor

Tobias Read
Secretary of State

Re: Support for SB 5539, the Department of State Lands budget bill

Elizabeth Steiner
State Treasurer

Dear Co-Chairs Senator Frederick and Representative Levy,

The Elliott State Research Forest (ESRF) Board of Directors was appointed by the State Land Board in 2024 and meets regularly to ensure oversight and ongoing public accountability, transparency, and meaningful engagement on the ESRF.

As Chair and Vice Chair of the ESRF Board of Directors, we submit this letter in support of the Governor's recommended Department of State Lands budget for FY 2025-27. After years of collaboration, coordination, and deliberation, the Elliott now stands as Oregon's first state research forest and is on track to begin operations in 2025. Approval of this budget bill will allow the Department and newly hired ESRF staff to operationalize the Legislature and Land Board's vision for the ESRF.

The bill contains an allocation of \$10 million in Other Funds to support general forest management, operations, and staffing. We have already procured an additional \$2 million in Federal Funds that are dedicated toward the redevelopment of the former Shutter Creek Correctional Facility into headquarters for research and operations on the ESRF.

Since last session, thanks to collaboration with the Department and the Land Board, we have made significant progress in standing up the ESRF. Our progress includes the following:

- Adoption of the initial ESRF Forest Management Plan by the Land Board in October 2024;
- Final submission of a federal Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP) under the Endangered Species Act, and federal agency release of the Final Environmental Impact Statement;
- Appointment of a diverse, highly qualified, public, nine-member advisory ESRF Board of Directors;
- Adoption of an Oversight Structure, consistent with those supported by the Legislature in SB 1546 (2022), to establish the ESRF's mission and management policies and guide decision-making.
- Successful hiring of ESRF Forest Manager Darren Goodding, Policy and Partnerships Coordinator Emma Sloan, and Biologist Amy Price;

- Commitment to carbon sequestration outcomes and revenue through initiation of a voluntary carbon market agreement on the ESRF, which will provide an opportunity to stabilize revenues for the ESRF and will act as a demonstration project to show the viability of carbon markets;
- Initiation of the Shutter Creek redevelopment project, which will create research forest headquarters and housing as well as broader potential local partnership opportunities;
- Coordination with researchers across disciplines, and approval of an agreement with Oregon State University to begin data collection and baseline monitoring, which will be conducted with funding already received from the U.S. Forest Service; and
- Release of a Biennial Operations Plan that includes timber harvest, habitat, monitoring and research projects for 2025-27.

We anticipate the federal HCP and permits will be issued in the coming months, followed by adoption of a Biennial Operations Plan and initiation of timber harvest and restoration work on the ESRF. Funding support in this FY 2025-27 budget will allow ESRF staff and the Board to begin next steps on education and recreation planning, relationships with Tribal partners, partnership advancement with local watershed councils and others, as well as operationalizing timber harvests, habitat projects, and research.

We urge you to continue the work the State Land Board and the Legislature has started and vote in favor of SB 5539. This budget is consistent with the ESRF Forest Management Plan's revenue and expense predictions and needs. Our goal remains ensuring that the ESRF is financially stable and self-sufficient, and with contracting to begin this upcoming biennium, we anticipate the ESRF will begin receiving revenue from timber and other sources in 2027-29.

Investing in SB 5539's budget for this coming biennium is an investment in work critical to establishing the ESRF's future financial self-sufficiency. The impact of these funds will extend beyond this biennium, ensuring the success of this public research forest for decades and generations to come.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this legislation.

Keith Tymchuk
Elliott State Research Forest Board Chair

Melissa Cribbins
Elliott State Research Forest Board Vice Chair