

Submitter:

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On Behalf Of:

Committee:

House Committee On Revenue

Measure, Appointment or Topic:

HB3489

Testimony in Opposition to HB 3489

Good Afternoon Members of the House Committee on Revenue,

My name is Brian Rabe and my wife and I own timbered acreage (Certified Tree Farm) in Baker County, Oregon, and have since 2007. We understand the importance of adequate funding for fighting wildfires – about 240 acres of our Tree Farm burned in the Cornet-Windy Ridge fire in 2015. However, I have concerns regarding several major issues with how this particular bill is structured.

The climate east of the Cascades results in a dramatically lower production of timber per acre than west of the Cascades. The infrastructure to support a healthy market for timber in eastern Oregon is also greatly diminished from what it was 30 years ago, resulting in less competition for purchasing timber (lower prices) and fewer loggers and log trucks (increasing costs). In addition, our predominant species is ponderosa pine, which is not used for dimensional lumber and is of much lower value than the predominant species in western Oregon (Douglas fir). It is very difficult to generate a positive return harvesting trees in this area. We have merchantable size ponderosa pine that is severely infected with dwarf mistletoe and continues to infect the young trees growing around them because we cannot afford to remove them because it already costs more to get the trees to the mill than the market will pay. Bottom line: Increasing the severance tax at the time of harvest will only make it harder to harvest timber and just break even.

In addition, there appears to be an incentive for certification by the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) but not for certification by the American Tree Farm System. Small private woodland owners (less than 5,000 acres) are more likely to participate in the Tree Farm system whereas larger corporate timber companies are more likely to seek certification through FSC. From my experience, both of these certification processes seek the same outcome – sustainable management of forest land, not just for timber production but also for wildlife habitat, water quality, and recreation.

This bill also eliminates funding for the Oregon Forest Resources Institute (OFRI). OFRI serves a vital function in the development and distribution of educational materials for both private forest landowners, and the general public, to support sustainable forest management, wildfire prevention, etc. Funding for OFRI must be maintained.

Please do not advance this bill. There has to be a better, more equitable, way to increase funding that does not increase the burden on eastern Oregon woodland owners or eliminate OFRI.

Respectfully submitted,

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