

Submitter:

Richard Fletcher

On Behalf Of:

Committee:

House Committee On Revenue

Measure, Appointment or Topic:

HB3489

Thank you for your efforts to revise the current tax system for forest landowners. As a lifelong family timberland owner on the Greensprings Mtns in Jeff Golden's district, and now in Benton County, I know first hand how important stewardship of these lands is our to sustaining the economy and environment in Oregon. As a retired OSU forestry professor, who headed up the nationwide Sustainable Forestry Partnership during the 1990's, I am concerned how this new tax structure might lead to some unpleasant outcomes for us all.

Doing away with the Oregon Forest Resources Institute will be a direct hit to the thousands of small forest landowners who depend upon that excellent publications (such as the forest practices guide) to make critical decisions on how and when to do forest practices. Revamp the mission of it if you like, but I believe its a big mistake to eliminate it without an alternative. Please consider how you might fund landowner and public education about forests under the new bill.

Hand picking the FSC certification system as the only system that gets a financial incentive is also not a good decision for the larger private, family owners that will be impacted by it. Part of my research and teaching at OSU was to work with all the certification systems and the large accounting firms to develop the forest auditing systems for certifiers. I participated in the very first audits done by the FSC on family forestlands in Oregon, and I trained auditors for several years before I retired in 2011. In my experience, FSC is very popular with environmental groups, but has significantly higher application costs, which are not justified by the actual management decisions implemented. A single option financial incentive for FSC looks a lot like a political move, that might be bridging on monopoly issues. Bad idea. Please offer other certification systems equal opportunity.

It seems like part of the intent here is to create more funds for wildland fire fighting. I commend that effort. When it comes to paying these costs, though, it seems like some of the money for this should come from the general fund. On my private forestlands, I have hundreds of pages of laws to follow to protect public wildlife, fish and water, plus ensure that there are thriving private forests for future generations. Should not the public also share in the fire fighting costs to protect their public resources on private lands? It seems like most of the big fires these days are beginning on largely neglected public lands and then spreading to private forests. Will the new severance tax revenues from public lands fully address this?

Thanks again for accepting testimony. I have been a lifelong advocate for Oregon

forests, and believe we have a wonderful legacy of protecting our forestlands through land use planning, and working through the Forest Practices Act to have practical laws in place to ensure the sustainability of our forests. Please move carefully and take all the time necessary to get this new tax bill fully vetted before you move forward. As it exists, it still needs a lot of work.