

I am writing to submit the strongest, most urgent support for HB 3489 — a bill that would restore a severance tax on timber harvested from Oregon’s public and private lands.

The financial and civic harm inflicted on Oregon’s rural counties by the elimination of the severance tax is staggering, undeniable, and ongoing. Without HB 3489 or a similar reform, our communities will continue to spiral deeper into economic precarity, even as billions of dollars in timber wealth flow out of our forests and into Wall Street investment funds.

I. County-Level Harms: The Evidence is Clear

Across western Oregon, the numbers tell a sobering story:

- **Benton County** lost an estimated **\$85 million** in severance tax revenue since 1991.
- **Clackamas County** lost **\$94.1 million**.
- **Clatsop County** lost **\$170 million**.
- **Columbia County** lost **\$134.5 million**.
- **Coos County** lost **\$208.9 million**.
- **Curry County** lost **\$63.8 million**.
- **Douglas County** — my home — lost an astounding **\$355 million**.
- **Hood River County** lost **\$13.7 million**.
- **Jackson County** lost **\$72.4 million**.
- **Josephine County** lost **\$21.1 million**.
- **Lane County** lost **\$368.4 million**.
- **Lincoln County** lost **\$122.1 million**.
- **Linn County** lost **\$189.6 million**.
- **Marion County** lost **\$51.8 million**.
- **Polk County** lost **\$106 million**.
- **Tillamook County** lost **\$72.1 million**.
- **Washington County** lost **\$93.4 million**.
- **Yamhill County** lost **\$82.2 million**.

This adds up to **over \$2.2 billion** in severance tax losses across western Oregon — and when combined with federal payment declines, rural counties have been drained of **more than \$5 billion** in essential public revenues.

II. Douglas County: An Epicenter of Loss

While some officials claim that county hardships stem solely from reduced federal timber harvests and declining timber receipts, the data tells a more complete story. In reality, **the elimination of Oregon's severance tax on private timber** has cost counties billions in essential revenue.

In Douglas County alone, **\$355 million** in severance tax revenue has been lost since 1991 — a staggering blow compounded by the loss of federal payments. **Even as private timber harvests continued and expanded**, local budgets were gutted because large corporations were no longer required to contribute fairly to the communities they profited from.

And yet despite these monumental losses, **Douglas County leadership has consistently refused to advocate for restoring big timber taxation.**

Tim Freeman, the Douglas County Commissioner and **current Chair of the Association of O&C Counties (AOCC)**, has spent years arguing that the solution to county poverty is increasing federal timber harvests — while remaining silent about the billions lost to **private timber tax cuts.**

This is a profound abdication of duty.

How can someone claim to defend rural Oregon while ignoring the largest, most preventable hemorrhage of public wealth in our counties' history?

Instead of supporting real fiscal reform, AOCC under Tim Freeman's leadership has focused narrowly on increasing logging on public lands — a strategy that ignores:

- The reality that **private lands now dominate** the Coast Range logging economy
- The fact that **logging is higher than ever**, yet communities remain underfunded
- The evidence that **counties like Douglas, Lane, and Coos** have lost far more to severance tax elimination than they can ever recover through increased federal timber sales

It is unconscionable that rural counties are forced to **raise property taxes on working families** to cover basic services, while **multinational timber corporations pay less per acre than local homeowners.**

In **Marcola**, a resident pays **100 times more per acre** than Weyerhaeuser.
In **Falls City**, the library is closed while clearcuts expand across every hill.

III. The Broken "Crop" Argument

Timber companies have long argued that timber should be treated like a crop, not a resource. But this false equivalence has devastating consequences.

Timber is not wheat.

It takes **40–80 years** to grow a harvestable tree — not one season.

It reshapes landscapes, ecosystems, and drinking watersheds.

The elimination of the severance tax has subsidized **short-cycle, industrial clear-cutting** that leaves counties with destroyed ecosystems, lost carbon storage, higher fire risks, and no funds for recovery.

Meanwhile, corporate owners are exporting raw logs overseas rather than supporting local mills, jobs, or tax bases.

HB 3489 is a necessary correction to a catastrophic policy failure.

IV. The Future at Stake

Without HB 3489:

- Rural counties will continue to close libraries, firehouses, and sheriff's offices.
- Residents will pay higher taxes while billion-dollar timber REITs pay almost nothing.
- Public trust in governance will continue to erode.
- Forest health will deteriorate under aggressive, unaccountable extraction.
- Oregon's promise of shared prosperity will be replaced by deepening regional inequality.

Passing HB 3489 would not only restore a fair share of timber wealth to the people — it would reestablish the most **basic accountability** in Oregon's land economy.

No single reform will undo three decades of extraction without restitution. But this bill would be a start — a vital first step toward ensuring that timber wealth serves the many, not just the few.

V. Conclusion: Stand With Rural Oregon, Not Corporate Timber

For too long, Oregon's rural counties have been used as rhetorical shields by the very industries that hollowed them out. **HB 3489 is a rare opportunity to shift course.**

Support HB 3489 — not just for Douglas County, not just for the Coast Range — but for every town, every school, every child who deserves a future where forests mean more than profits.

Thank you for your attention and your commitment to public service.