



February 17, 2026

Co-Chairs Helm and Owens and Members of the Committee,

Willamette Riverkeeper submits this testimony in strong opposition to HB 4105. Willamette Riverkeeper is a nonprofit organization that works to protect and restore the Willamette River and its tributaries through habitat restoration, education and outreach, and advocacy. Protecting forests across the Willamette Basin is central to this work, as forest health is inseparably linked to water quality, climate resilience, and public health.

Oregon's state forests are legally managed for the Greatest Permanent Values, including clean air and water, properly functioning aquatic habitat, wildlife habitat, productive soils, and climate benefits.<sup>1</sup> Historically, however, forest management has prioritized industrial-scale clearcutting and short-term timber revenue over long-term public benefit. HB 4105 would further entrench this imbalance by elevating logging above all other permanent values, rather than requiring balanced management as intended under existing law.

The science clearly demonstrates that intensive logging and clearcutting increase sedimentation in rivers, reduce stream shading, raise water temperatures, degrade soil productivity, and impair habitat for salmonids and other native species.<sup>2</sup> These impacts directly undermine water quality, increase treatment costs for downstream communities, reduce climate resilience, and degrade the public trust resources Oregonians depend on for drinking water, recreation, and fisheries.

At a time of accelerating climate change and increasingly volatile weather patterns, HB 4105 would weaken existing safeguards by preventing meaningful implementation of the Oregon Department of Forestry's Climate Change and Carbon Plan. The bill would only require *consideration*, not compliance, with the state forest Habitat Conservation Plan and other policies that protect clean water, fish and wildlife habitat, and increase carbon capture. In practice, that means ODF can acknowledge risk without being able to reduce harvest accordingly. Consideration without the ability to change outcomes is not adaptive management. These plans and policies exist because they are necessary to meet legal obligations and protect public resources. Failing to require compliance of these policies and plans is irresponsible and inconsistent with sound forest governance.

HB 4105 also carries a significant fiscal cost despite being unnecessary and duplicative. The State Forester already establishes sustainable harvest levels, and the Oregon Department of Forestry has exceeded its harvest

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<sup>1</sup> See OAR 629-035-0020.

<sup>2</sup> See *The Pros and Cons of Clearcutting*, Church & Church Lumber Company (Sept. 2, 2024), <https://churchandchurchlumber.com/blog/the-pros-and-cons-of-clearcutting>; *About Clearcutting*, Sierra Club, <https://www.sierraclub.org/grassroots-network/stop-clearcutting-ca/about-clearcutting>.

objectives over the past decade.<sup>3</sup> This bill would not improve forest management outcomes; instead, it would mandate a logging-first approach that conflicts with existing plans while adding avoidable costs during a period of severe budget constraints.

Compounding this concern, HB 4105 creates a new pathway for litigation if projected harvest levels are not met, allowing outside parties to seek court orders compelling the State Forester to comply with harvest mandates. This represents a dramatic shift in forest governance. Rather than supporting adaptive, science-based management, the bill opens the door for lawsuits that could force increased harvest even when wildfire risk, climate stress, or habitat conditions warrant restraint. Such litigation would expose taxpayers to additional legal costs and further politicize professional forest management decisions.

Supporters argue that minimum harvest targets are needed to fund counties and schools. In reality, mandatory minimum harvests lock the state into extraction regardless of market conditions, climate stress, or forest health, and expose public services to long-term revenue instability. Sustainable working forests require flexibility, not fixed extraction mandates. Oregon should instead diversify forest-based revenue and job opportunities through recreation, carbon and climate finance, watershed restoration and protection investments, and stabilization mechanisms that reduce public costs while supporting communities.

The kind of forestry management that this bill encourages often creates even-aged, densely stocked stands that allow fire to move quickly into the canopy under hot, dry, windy conditions. A logging-first model relies heavily on herbicides to establish and maintain these operations. In 2008, the last year the state required amounts of herbicide sprayed to be reported, more than 800,000 pounds of herbicides were sprayed on Oregon's private timberland.<sup>4</sup> When we prioritize rapid harvest and simplified replanting, rural communities bear the wildfire intensity, water quality impacts, and exposure risks,<sup>5</sup> while corporate owners capture the profits. HB 4105 pushes Oregon further toward this high-risk, extraction-driven model instead of climate-resilient forest stewardship.

Forest management in the state is already out of balance with the values of many Oregonians who expect state forests to protect clean water, fish and wildlife, climate stability, and long-term resilience. HB 4105 would deepen that imbalance and continue a precedent that moves Oregon further away from responsible, science-based forest stewardship.

Willamette Riverkeeper is also deeply concerned about apparent conflicts of interest surrounding HB 4105. Public records show that some sponsors have professional or financial ties to the commercial timber industry, including familial ownership interests in logging operations that would directly benefit from the bill's provisions.<sup>6</sup> When legislation that weakens environmental safeguards and increases public costs is sponsored by

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<sup>3</sup> See Ted Sickinger, *Failing forestry: Oregon's forestry department is on an unsustainable path*, The Oregonian (Oct. 25, 2019), <https://www.oregonlive.com/environment/2019/10/failing-forestry-oregons-forestry-department-is-on-an-unsustainable-path.html>.

<sup>4</sup> Rob Davis, *In Oregon, helicopters spray weed killers near people under West Coast's weakest protections*, The Oregonian (Oct. 23, 2014), [https://www.oregonlive.com/environment/2014/10/in\\_oregon\\_helicopters\\_spray\\_we.html](https://www.oregonlive.com/environment/2014/10/in_oregon_helicopters_spray_we.html).

<sup>5</sup> See Rebecca Clarren, *Timberland herbicide spraying sickens a community*, High Country News (Nov. 10, 2014), <https://www.hcn.org/issues/46-19/timberland-herbicide-spraying-sickens-a-community>.

<sup>6</sup> For example, Representative Darin Harbick, a regular sponsor of this bill, sold Harbick's Inc., a logging and dump truck business to his son Trey in 2024.

those who may directly financially benefit, it undermines public trust and confidence in the system and raises ethical concerns that demand heightened transparency.

Decisions about Oregon's state forests must be grounded in science, law, and the public trust—not shaped by policies that advantage private business interests at the expense of clean water, climate resilience, and long-term ecosystem health.

For these reasons, Willamette Riverkeeper opposes HB 4105. Please vote no on this bill.

Thank you for your consideration,

Michelle Emmons

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