



April 16, 2015

To: House Committee on Rural Communities, Land Use and Water
Representative Brian Clem, Chair

Re: HB 3474 Trust Lands Transfer Commission - SUPPORT

The League of Women Voters of Oregon (LWVOR) is a non-partisan political organization that encourages informed citizen participation in government.

We have reviewed the summary and text for House Bill 3474, which establishes a Trust Lands Transfer Commission to assist public bodies in identifying and developing property interests in trust lands. We support HB 3474 because we believe it will help the State Land Board to move forward in decoupling the Elliott State Forest from the Common School Fund. However, we also support a final decision that protects the Elliott State Forest for future generations.

LWVOR acknowledges that this is a very difficult issue because of an outdated arrangement that couples a pristine forest ecosystem to school funding. Our schools and protection of our forests are both important and one should not have to be chosen at the expense of the other.


The League of Women Voters of the United States believes that natural resources such as forests, and the animals and plants living within them, should be managed as interrelated parts of life-supporting ecosystems. Resources should be conserved and protected to assure their future availability, particularly the over 40,000 acres of forestlands on the Elliott State Forest that have never been logged. These native rainforests provide critical habitat for a host of species teetering on the brink of extinction like the marbled murrelet and northern spotted owl. Pollution of these resources should be stopped in order to preserve the physical, chemical and biological integrity of ecosystems and to protect public health. With any final outcome by the Trust Lands Transfer Commission government protections should be upheld.

In part, because of our recent coastal and water studies (“Coastal and Nearshore Oregon: Using and Protecting Our natural Resources”, and “Water In Oregon-Not a Drop to Waste” both by the LWV of Oregon Education Fund), we favor careful landscape management to insure protection of the rivers and streams, as well as the endangered salmon and other fish in the Elliott Forest. In addition, LWVOR puts a priority on recreational use of such areas. Fisheries experts have determined that streams originating in the Elliott support nearly 25% of the wild coho salmon productivity in Oregon. This underscores the need to safeguard the forest, which in turn protects the water quality critical to Coho survival and persistence. Protecting and preserving natural, scenic, cultural, historic, and wildlife sites is an appropriate use of parks and state forests. Preserving the Elliott State Forest and providing more recreational opportunities, like hiking trails and fishing, should be a part of this function.

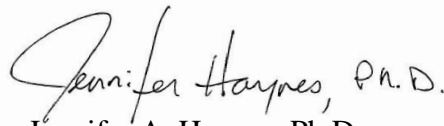
The best transition scenario, and the best management strategy, decouples old-growth clearcutting from school funding, protects the Elliott's remaining native forests, wild salmon and imperiled wildlife, safeguards the Elliott for public recreational and educational opportunities, and promotes timber jobs by restoratively thinning the second-growth tree farms; however, we oppose the privatization of the Elliott State Forest.

In conclusion, the Elliott State Forest has become an Oregon icon as something other than an "investment" that is meant to earn an income, if only for the endangered species that use the forest. As such, the League supports a plan to decouple the school funding from timber receipts from the Elliott State Forest, replace those receipts through more responsible sources, and keep the Elliott State Forest as a public treasure for future generations.

Sincerely,



Robin Wisdom,
LWVOR President



Jennifer A. Haynes, Ph.D.,
LWVOR Natural Resources, Forestry Portfolio