



April 15, 2015

Chairman Brian Clem
Committee on Rural Communities, Land Use, and Water
House of Representatives
Oregon State Legislature

Dear Chairman Clem:

My name is Bob Ragon. I am Executive Director of Douglas Timber Operators, a regional trade association in Roseburg, Oregon representing the Timber Industry and allied groups in Lane, Coos and Douglas Counties. My manufacturing members have been the primary purchasers of timber sales from the Elliott State Forest since the early 1970's. I personally purchased Elliott Timber Sales for my employer beginning in 1976 when I began working for Sun Studs in Roseburg where we operated a stud mill and veneer plan using 120 MMBF of logs annually. The Elliott was a small but important source of wood for us and, at that time, was selling 50 to 55 MMBF annually.

Attached to my testimony is a map of the Elliott showing the fire that burned through that area in 1868. The map was drawn by Jerry Phillips, District Manager for the Forest, in 1989 when he retired. He began working on the Forest in 1956 as the road system was being built and the first timber sales were sold to pay for construction costs. The fire started in the upper right corner of the red area and was blown south by a north east wind across the Umpqua River and continued burning a wide swath until it ran out of fuel on the banks of Coos Bay. The fire burned 300,000 acres in 35 days, averaging a daily burn rate of 8,600 acres. The green areas are stands of Old Growth Douglas-fir that were harvested as part of the early timber sale program to pay for building the road system.

Attached also is an early aerial photo of the Forest taken 1934 showing what the Elliott looked like before timber harvesting and before logging roads were built. In the lower right corner you can barely make out a CCC road that was built to provide access for firefighting purposes.

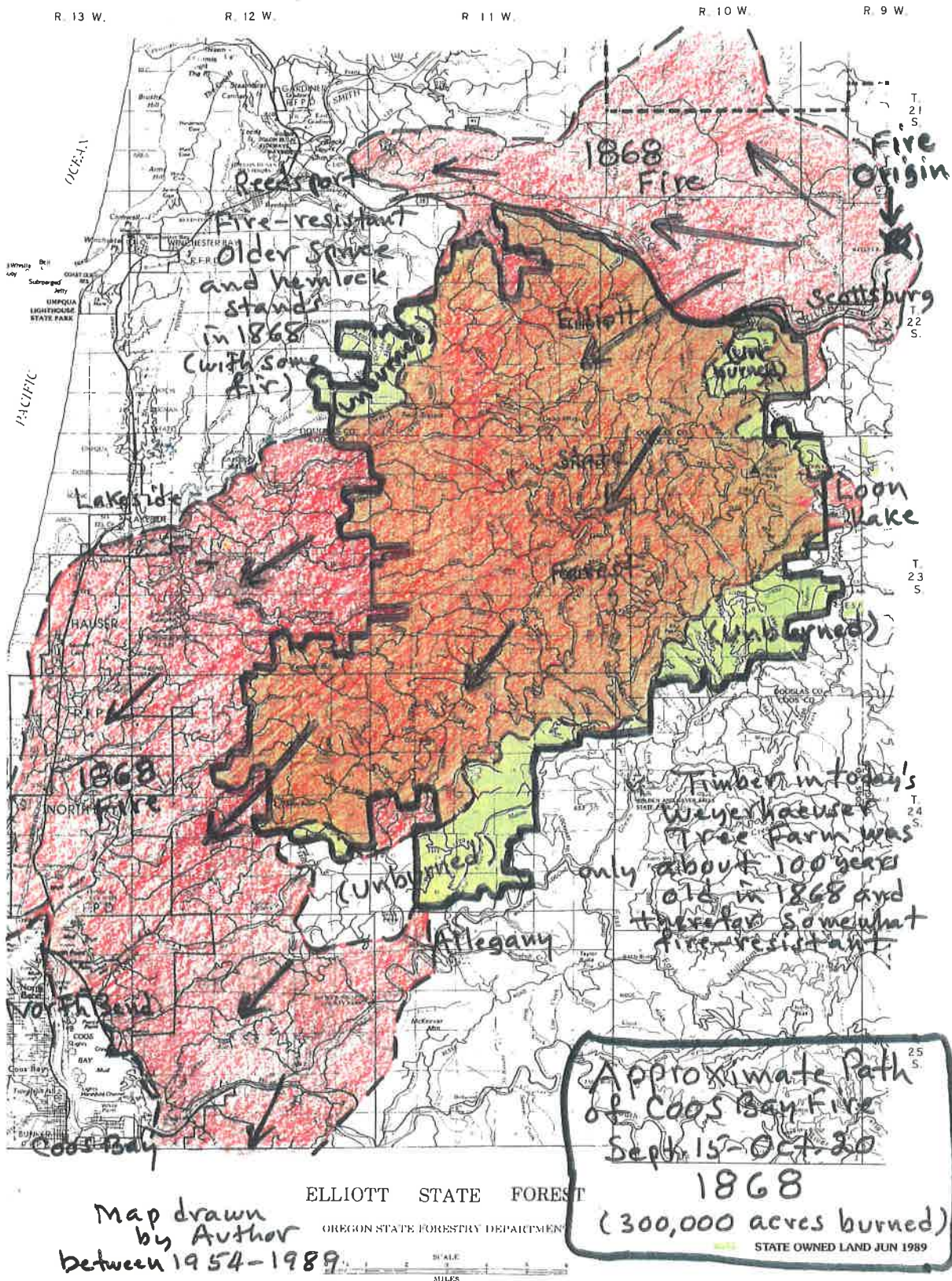
I show you this for a couple of reasons. First, the Elliott is located in steep rugged country and is accessed by single lane logging roads with turnouts to accommodate passing vehicles. There are no guardrails on the roads and it is not user friendly to tourists. There are no developed campgrounds on the Elliott since there is little recreational use of the area except by big game hunters during the fall season. Second, for you to better understand this Forest, recognize there are high annual maintenance costs. Approximately \$250,000 is spent for annual fire protection and double that amount, or more, to maintain the approximately 500 miles of road the State constructed to provide logging access. If the roads are not maintained, they will fail during heavy rain storms and will become overgrown with brush in a relatively short time, making access for firefighting impossible and the likelihood of a repeat of the 1868 fire.

I close by suggesting the legislation being considered be amended to include a section allowing due diligence by the Legislature into the costs of owning or holding the Elliott that is a liability if not producing timber, and to specifically include more than just a valuation of the property, but a long term cash flow projection on maintaining that liability. Before the Legislature appropriates any funds for a potential purchase, they better have a clear picture of what the taxpayers of Oregon are buying. Finally, I think this legislation is premature while the Land Board has yet to figure out what they want to do with this Forest.

Sincerely,
Douglas Timber Operators

Robert E. Ragon,
Executive Director

According to the article on "The Oregon State Forest" which appeared in the 1929 Annual Report of the State Forester, "This forest lay in the path of the historic Coos Bay fire. In 1868 the fire swept from the northeast, leaped the Umpqua River, burned over all the forest, with the exception of the southeast portion, and stopped only when it reached the waters of Coos Bay."



Typical Elliott State Forest lands

Dec. 12, 1934 Photo



Typical 1934 aerial oblique photo from project. Note newly built CCC road which appears on lower right corner of photo. Dean's Creek drainage dominates. Fog lies in Umpqua River canyon.