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To: Members of the Senate Committee on Environment and Natural Resources
From: Rhett Lawrence, Oregon Chapter Sierra Club
Date: March 20, 2017
RE: Senate Bill 847

Good afternoon, Chair Dembrow and Members of the Committee. My name is Rhett Lawrence and I am the Conservation Director for the Oregon Chapter of the Sierra. On behalf of the more than 20,000 members and supporters of the Sierra Club in Oregon, I am pleased to be able to testify before you today in support of Senate Bill 847.

As an organization with a long history of working on public lands, the Sierra Club is strongly supportive of SB 847, and we would like to thank Senator Roblan for bringing it forward this session. This bill would set up a simple way for the Department of State Lands (DSL) and the State Land Board to transfer trust lands, giving Oregonians the opportunity to stop making false choices between protecting our environment and funding education.

SB 847 expands the options for DSL and gives them more flexibility with trust lands, which will allow it to make the best investments possible for the Common School Fund. This approach will allow DSL to transfer the best lands (both encumbered and otherwise) out of their ownership while also identifying which lands should remain under their control for continued timber harvest or other uses. Such a mechanism can thus help to keep those lands with special public values in public ownership while also maintaining and improving economic returns to the Common School Fund.

We believe that enabling the state to create a trust lands transfer mechanism will allow us to attain two important goals. First, the management and protection of valuable natural areas will guarantee an environmental legacy for our kids and grandkids. Second, deposits from trust land transfers into the Common School Fund will give us the opportunity to diversify the fund's portfolio, leading to a more stable and robust revenue source for our schools. This model has worked well in Washington State for decades and has both protected special places and provided real benefit to the state's schools.

Finally, the trust lands transfer program could be an important tool to help Oregon solve the longstanding problem of what to do with the Elliott State Forest. The Sierra Club has worked for years to try to find solutions to protect the Elliott and keep it in public ownership. We believe this legislation could go a long way towards getting our state to a lasting and meaningful solution for the Elliott. For all of these reasons, the Oregon Chapter of the Sierra Club supports Senate Bill 847 and we urge this committee to do the same. Thank you very much for considering my comments and please let me know if I can be of further assistance to the Committee.