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Members of the Subcommittee on Natural Resources

Re: SB 5537 Budget of the Department of State Lands

There has been quite a discussion in recent months about the Elliott State Forest and the fact that it has been losing money during the past few years. It seems clear that these lands are currently a drain on the Common School Fund (CSF) rather than generating revenue for the fund. It appears that the best way to keep these lands in state ownership would be to decouple them from their obligation under the CSF and transfer the lands to other state agencies to manage.

Some of these same concerns also apply to the high desert grasslands in central and southeast Oregon that the Department of State Lands manages for the benefit of the CSF. I understand that current revenues from the leasing of these lands just covers the management costs, leaving few funds to support Oregon's school children. Perhaps the long-term solution for these lands is also to remove the connection to the CSF and transfer these lands to other state agencies.

The Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife would be the logical successor agency for some of the lands and they could manage them primarily for the benefit of native wildlife while allowing public access for many recreational activities. The Oregon Parks and Recreation Department could be the recipient of the lands in the far southeastern corner of the state and those lands could become the Owyhee Canyonlands State Park.

