



June 5, 2017

Oregon League of Conservation Voters Testimony on SB 847

Senator Lew Frederick and Representative Brad Witt, Co-Chairs
Joint Ways and Means Subcommittee on Natural Resources
Oregon State Capitol
Salem, OR 97301

Dear Co-Chairs Frederick, Witt, and Committee Members:

For the record my name is Paige Spence and I am the Director of the Oregon Conservation Network. The Oregon Conservation Network is coordinated through the Oregon League of Conservation Voters and is a coalition of nearly 40 not-for-profit organizations throughout Oregon united to advocate for pro-conservation legislation and to fight policies that threaten our state's natural legacy.

The Oregon Conservation Network supports SB 847 and thanks you for the opportunity to discuss our position. The Oregon Conservation Network groups who have been working on this issue include the Wild Salmon Center, Trout Unlimited, Cascadia Wildlands, Portland Audubon, Friends of Mt Hood, and the Oregon Chapter of the Sierra Club.

Today, the OCN is asking this committee to support legislation to create a Trust Land Transfer Program through SB 847. This bill creates a process for transferring lands currently managed for Common School Fund benefits, and which are not living up to their potential, to other public agencies who are better equipped to manage these lands for benefit of Oregonians.

Oregon's Common School Lands have a strong mandate to produce revenue for the Common School Fund. But in many cases the lands have legally protected environmental assets or used by the public for hunting and fishing. The tension between environmental or social concerns and revenue pressure creates a conflict.

SB 847 is modeled on a successful Trust Land Transfer program in Washington State that was created to address the same problem in Washington. SB 847 does not mandate any spending or action, it simply creates a tool that the Land Board could use to identify and propose for lands to be transferred out of the Common School Fund to other government agencies.

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The Legislature would retain final authority to complete a final deal via legislation. Funds to compensate the Common School Fund might come from state revenues or local revenues. Senate Bill 847 passed out of the Senate Committee on Environment and Natural Resources. It has been referred to the Joint Committee on Ways and Means despite the fact that it is expected to have no fiscal impact on the legislature - Passing SB 847 does not in itself create any financial obligation for the State.

But Senate Bill 847 has a far broader reach than just the Elliott. We as a state have over 600,000 acres of Common School Fund lands in Oregon that need to be managed - rangeland, forest land, and more - and we hope that a Trust Land Transfer program can be implemented in Oregon with twin outcomes: Providing stable funding for our schools through productive timber harvesting on some state lands, and managing other lands which may include Oregon's most special places for conservation.

The Elliott State Forest is the epitome of Oregon's special places, which is why in 1933 this coastal rainforest became our first state forest. Today, the Elliott is home to towering old-growth trees, clean, cold waterways teeming with salmon, and crucial habitat for wildlife and recreationists alike. It was worth protecting in 1933 and even more so today.

As we heard from our colleague at Washington's Department of Natural Resources during the Senate Environment and Natural Resources Committee hearing, Washington has had a very similar and successful program since the 1980s. If Oregon had had a TLT Program in place since then, too, perhaps we wouldn't be in the position with the Elliott that we are today.

For the reasons my Oregon Conservation Network Colleagues will outline, I urge your support of SB 847. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Paige Spence

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