



UNIFIED BUSINESS OREGON OPPOSES HB 2656

Chair Helm, Vice-Chairs Reschke and Schouten, and members of the Energy & Environment Committee:

Background: Oregon's timber industry sector has long been a revenue-positive generator for the state's economy. With some 85,000 jobs including loggers, wood products producers, and post-production manufacturers, timber is still an important industry cluster, providing family-wage jobs. Moreover, these jobs provide the shoulder support to community jobs in the retail and service sectors where timber industry employees spend their wages. Lastly, our timber industry is still a net-positive contributor to the property and income tax base of the state, providing much-needed revenue for our schools, public safety, and critical human services.

Areas of Concern for HB 2656: As written, this measure ignores much of the meaningful work that has been done in the past three decades in cooperation with private foresters and the state's Department of Forestry, which has been a leader on increasing safety in Oregon forests. Oregon's private timber owners abide by the laws of the Oregon Forest Practices Act, and most foresters live in the same communities in which they work. When Unified Business Oregon has done polling work into forest-area communities, there is no doubt that residents understand the need to create a balance between protecting the environment and preserving the family-wage jobs that our timber industry creates. To that end, Oregon's private foresters continue to make meaningful strides in protecting their business assets, recognizing that good stewardship ensures their forest assets will be of value to our state, their employees, and our environment for years to come.

Private foresters also work proactively with local watershed and water municipalities. House Bill 2656 as written takes none of that into account, and instead, takes a punitive approach which we believe effectively bans logging on private forest lands. The narrow exceptions process outlined in the bill will also put significant pressure on the Department of Forestry at a time when the agency has increased responsibilities relating to wildfire management and is doing more work on less funding.

While we appreciate proponents of the measure feel strongly about the environment, as do we, it's unclear that there are any findings that would indicate the responsible forest practices of private landowners have resulted in contamination of local water sources. If there is data that shows otherwise, we'd suggest the committee seek alternatives to deliver sanctions to bad actors rather than taking the approach of punishing the entire industry.

Impact: Oregon's forest economy has never fully rebounded from industry-wide regulations and environmental concerns of the 1980's and '90s. We believe far-sweeping legislation like HB 2656 would have the effect of being a nail in the coffin, shutting down 70-75% of the remaining private forest management jobs, impacting tens of thousands of direct industry jobs, and having a ripple effect on the retail and service industries which support those workers. It would also be a net loss to the state's income tax revenue and local property tax revenues at a time when the state economists are predicting an economic downturn in the latter portion of the biennium.



Moreover, as the state seeks to be an environmental leader, our private forest owners are doing much to help sequester carbon and protect the air we breathe. Without good forest practice management, which does include the use of herbicides to keep down the underbrush which contributes to wildfire, we open up our forests to uncontrollable wildfire that releases untold carbon into the atmosphere.

Conclusion: We all care about living in a state that is safe, and where our environment is protected. House Bill 2656 unwinds decades of forest stewardship and partnerships, limits forestry practices which have been shown to be safe and puts the remainder of our timber industry employment at risk. At a time when the state is focused on bills to cap carbon, a bill which ties the hands of a key industry partner and puts people out of work seems counter-productive.

The Oregon Forest Practices Act works, and law-abiding private foresters shouldn't be treated as criminals, as House Bill 2656 would put into statute. While there is always room to improve on forest stewardship, this measure is not the solution.

Before this measure is further considered, Unified Business Oregon would encourage committee members to reach out to local water masters and seek their input on what's really happening in our timber communities. We'd also encourage you to reach out to private timber owners and request a property tour. Lastly, we'd urge you to vote on this measure based on data, scientific evidence, and the experienced knowledge of professionals in the forest industry, including the Oregon Department of Forestry. ODF works hard to ensure compliance and has a positive working relationship with Oregon's private foresters. Let's foster that relationship, not drive a wedge between ODF and landowners.

Rural Oregon cannot afford to shutter thousands of family-wage jobs in Oregon's timber industry.

Unified Business Oregon encourages you to **OPPOSE HB 2656** and seek collaborative approaches with those who steward our private forests.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Lou Ogden", written in a cursive style.

Lou Ogden
Executive Director