

To: The House Committee on Energy and the Environment,

Chair Helm, Vice-Chair Reschke, Vice-Chair Schouten, Committee members

Cc: Representative Mike Nearman

From: Susan Watkins, 13440 SW McCabe Chapel Road, McMinnville 97128, maczenith@onlinemac.com

Date: March 12, 2019

Re: HB 2656

My husband and I live on a small forest in Yamhill County. According to the map of drinking water sources for public water systems prepared by the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality's Water Quality Division (Version 10, January 15, 2019), nearly all of Yamhill County will be impacted by this bill. That is, under HB 2656, almost no tree farmer in my county would be allowed to use a pesticide in their woods.

We purchased our property in 1992, after it had been cut over and abandoned. What we got was 55 acres of blackberry, poison oak, and Canada thistle. Now, after planting more than 11,000 trees, we have 45 acres of (mainly) fir forest and 9 acres dedicated to oak restoration. To establish the desired native species, including native grasses, forbs, and pollinators, we had to first control the invasive weeds. Elk and deer and songbirds now frequent our land. We could not have accomplished this without the use of pesticides.

When we first purchased our land, being city people, we thought that forests grew naturally by themselves. That was before the waves of invasives and undesirables: the Canada thistle, St. John's wort, ox-eye daisies, Queen Anne's lace, shining Crane's bill geranium. If we wanted those little trees to grow, we needed to control all this competing vegetation, most of it nonnative and therefore not contributing the necessary food or shelter to our local wildlife.

I took OSU Extension's Basic Forestry Short Course and became a Master Woodland Manager. I helped write the *Ties to the Land* succession planning program now used nation-wide. I joined the Committee for Family Forestlands, which advises the Board of Forestry, serving more than six years, the last as its chair. I learned that a healthy forest is neither a neat park nor a wild tangle, but instead a wood that provides shade for water; downed wood, snags, shrubs, and wildflowers for wildlife; and large open spaces for deer and elk.

There are more than 60,000 family forest owners in Oregon. By definition, a "small" forest can be up to 5,000 acres, but nearly three-quarters of us own fewer than 50. Together, we own about 14% of the forestland in the state and contribute about 12% of the annual timber harvest. Well over half of us already manage our forests to protect water, provide for wildlife, and create an aesthetic environment. Only about a third consider harvesting timber an important reason to own forestland. Yet we all want our forests to be sustainable and healthy.

Working with the Department of Forestry for so long I saw how reliant the Department is on science. The requirements of the Forest Practices Act, which seems to get little respect in its home state but is a model for the rest of the nation and the world, are based on long-term studies and peer-reviewed work.

I am aware of no science that supports the rationale of HB 2656.

Data from the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality has long shown that the best water quality in the state comes from forested watersheds, including those where forests are actively managed and pesticides are used.

The greatest threat to water quality in Oregon today comes from wildfire. Wildfires release sediment into surface water, killing fish and increasing the cost of treating drinking water.

If we cannot clear the weeds and invasive vegetation from our forests, they will become more, not less, susceptible to fire. Trees that must compete unreasonably for water, soil nutrients, and sunlight become more vulnerable to insect infestations and disease. As we have seen with fires on federal lands, wildfire will spread more rapidly through dense woods with ailing trees and plenty of ladder fuels, including invasives like highly flammable Scotch broom.

Healthy forests are also key to sequestering carbon. This is true both in standing trees and in the wood products made from those trees. The carbon remains locked in the wood for decades after harvest. More than 75% of the wood fiber produced in Oregon comes from areas covered by HB 2656. Trees that have been attacked by insects or disease or that are stunted by competition from less desirable plants will neither sequester as much carbon or provide the strength required for today's wood products.

Moreover, if Oregon's forests are allowed to degrade, the wood we depend on will come from other locations, including areas of the world where best forest practices are not the norm.

The worst consequence of HB 2656, however, may well be the outright loss of forestlands. Most family forest owners are at or near retirement age, and most are struggling as it is to convince a younger generation to take over management of the woods. If forest landowners are not allowed to maintain their woods in a healthy, sustainable way, the value of their lands will diminish, and there will be less incentive to continue owning forestland and more pressure on government to allow conversion to other uses. HB 2656 could well have the effect of converting forests -- which provide the cleanest air and water in the state -- to farms and towns, which provide the worst.

I urge you to reject his bill.

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