

The Honorable Ken Helm
House Committee on Energy and Environment
State Capitol
Salem, OR 97310

March 12, 2019

Thank you, Chair Helm, members of the committee, my name is Brennan Garrelts. I am here today to testify in opposition to HB 2656. I am both a professional wildland firefighter and practicing forester, and I currently serve on the Board of Directors for the Douglas Forest Protective Association in Southwest Oregon.

Proponents want you to believe that this bill is necessary to “protect rural Oregon’s drinking water”, claiming it will force private forestland owners to manage forests to produce clean drinking water. As a rural Oregonian with 15 years of experience managing both federal and private timberland, I can attest that private forestland owners already manage forestland to protect drinking water. State produced reports confirm that highest quality water of any land use in the state is found in managed forest.

Advocates for HB2656 are using this bill to end logging and productive forest management. Responsible forest management on forestland is about sustainably managing and protecting all forest ecosystems services. If this bill is enacted and land managers are barred from sustainably and responsibility managing our lands our forest will burn beyond what is already occurring.

Following a devastating wildfire, massive amounts of sedimentation are introduced into surface water; killing fish and increasing municipal costs for drinking water filtration. As our summers get hotter and dryer our need to extinguish wildfires gets more desperate. As a professional wildland firefighter for the past 15 years, I can tell you that some of the most valuable tools we have to extinguish a fire are a well-maintained road system and active forest management infrastructure. One need only to look at the devastation and acres of forestland burned on the US Forest Service in Oregon as evidence of what poor management and decommissioned roads does to the ability to effectively extinguish a fire.

Overstocked, diseased and inaccessible federal forestlands have been the source of roughly 86 percent of acres burned in Oregon wildfires over the last decade.

Conversely, over the last two fire seasons, fewer than ten percent of the acres burned in wildfires have been on private lands. Part of the reason for that is because we reduce fuel loads through harvest, and we maintain access through well-maintained road systems, this bill would ban both of these management tools. HB 2656 would be more restrictive than California’s Forest Practices Act, which has created the worst fire conditions in state history. In response, California is currently looking for ways to increase harvest levels to decrease fire risk.

Rural Oregon does not need urban activist groups to tell us how to sustainably and responsibly manage our forestlands for the greater good. Forestry is one of the most highly regulated industries in Oregon and the majority of those regulations are in place specifically to protect water quality. I encourage you to read the Oregon Forest Practices Act the see for yourself.

Sincerely,



Brennan Garrelts
Roseburg, OR