

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

March 20, 2019

I am writing in opposition to HB 2656. As a rural Oregonian from Southwest Oregon who is directly employed in the woods, I can tell you that Oregon's drinking water is already well protected under the Oregon Forest Practices Act and Department of Environmental Quality.

Private forestland owners already manage forestland to protect drinking water. In fact, the state's own data confirms that forestland produces the highest quality water of any land use in the state. Forestry is one of the most highly regulated industries in Oregon and many of those regulations are in place specifically to protect water quality. I encourage you to read the reports and examine the Oregon Forest Practices Act for yourself.

HB 2656 is a Trojan Horse. It's not about protecting drinking water – it's about ending logging and production forest management. HB 2656 won't protect rural Oregonians, it will put them out of a job, and it will put their backyards – whether that's where they work, play or both – at risk of wildfire. Overstocked, diseased and inaccessible federal forestlands have been the source of roughly 86 percent of acres burned in Oregon wildfires over the last decade. Wildfires introduce massive amounts of sedimentation into surface water, killing fish and increasing municipal costs for drinking water filtration. One need only look to the harmful algae blooms occurred in Detroit Lake, which is Salem's drinking water, that occurred in 2018. The lands above Detroit Lake are predominantly owned by the U.S. Forest Service and have been inadequately managed and repeatedly burned over the past 20 years resulting in a drinking water crisis for nearly 200,000 Oregonians.

This bill won't protect water quality for rural Oregonians, but it will do something: it would shut down the productivity of private forestland in this state. That absolutely will impact Oregonians, and not in a good way. Private forestland is responsible for roughly 78 percent of Oregon's timber harvest, and we're the number one softwood lumber producing state in the nation – providing renewable, carbon-storing building materials that Oregonians should be proud of. Our forests provide clean air and water, wildlife habitat, recreation opportunities and logs to more than 100 mills in Oregon and creates jobs for more than 60,000 Oregonians. If harvest disappears, the mills and the tens of thousands of rural, family-wage jobs disappear too.

Rural Oregon does not need urban activist groups to help protect our already clean drinking water. Forest landowners already care deeply about the health of our forest and the drinking water we receive from them. We believe, and have science to support it, that our forest and forest management practices already protect our water, the water we get from our faucets to feed ourselves and our families in rural Oregon. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

David Sutton

Melrose, Oregon