

Small Private Timber Owners Oppose OR SB 931

Chairman Dembrow and members of the Committee on Environment and Natural Resources,

My name is Mitchel Clarke and I'm the president and manager of Leatherman Land & Timber, a small, private timber company located southeast of Coos Bay, Oregon. I am speaking in opposition to SB 931 which would make it difficult to afford, and potentially impossible to schedule the herbicide treatments we use following each harvest.

Herbicide treatments help grow healthy forests. To increase young seedling growth and early development, we use herbicides to control the competing noxious weeds and invasive species on our sustainably managed forest lands. These treatments allow our living investments a competitive advantage in the first few crucial years of growth; a time when weeds specialize in rapidly dominating the early seral landscape. These weeds suppress the small seedlings by consuming light, water, and nutrients which decreases annual tree growth and increases mortality.

Controlling invasive weeds is a major part of our operation. It is arguably the most important treatment we do as part of our management plan, but access isn't easy. We don't grow timber in cultivated farm fields. We grow it in remote Oregon forests on steep, often dangerous, terrain. There are units on our lands that can only be treated by aerial application. Using hand crews for herbicide treatments isn't always appropriate, and it's always more expensive.

Even under current regulations it can be difficult for small woodland owners to schedule aerial applications because of the small scale of the work we do. For us, a local consulting forester pools together several land owners to provide a sufficient volume of work and attract aerial applicators. With the increased cost associated with more intensive and unnecessary paperwork and equipment, we will likely lose their attention altogether as they focus on larger industrial clients with more clout who can provide them consistent annual work. Without aerial applicators to service our landowners, local labor crews will be overwhelmed, units will go untreated, and forest health will decline.

The notification requirements included in SB 931 are simply untenable. The constantly changing winds and rain of Oregon restrict operations, and selecting a single treatment date weeks in advance is virtually impossible. In 2016, our aerial treatments were delayed for 3 weeks as higher priority clients were experiencing weather delays. Our operations were delayed for 3 days, while land owners waited behind us. When the season ended, some of our neighbors' units remained untreated. SB 931 would further increase delays over mounds of unnecessary paperwork.

At best, these regulations would greatly increase labor and equipment costs. At worst, small land owners would lose access to applicators, and the capacity of local labor resources would be exceeded. Applicators, forestry managers, consultants, and land owners are contentious professionals with a history of regulatory compliance. The Pesticide Use Reporting System worked. It just needs funding. I strongly urge you to oppose SB 931 to help land owners keep Oregon's renewable working forests healthy and strong.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Mitchel Clarke, President,
Leatherman Land & Timber Co.