

Written testimony in favor of HB 2357

Chair Witt and members of the Committee: I am speaking in favor of HB 2357. My name is Jeff Edmundson. I have a doctorate in Educational Leadership, and was a HS teacher for 20 years and a teacher educator for 25 years. I retired from directing the teacher education program at the University of Oregon. I have published two curriculum books and a textbook on ecological education.

I would like to discuss the extreme level of bias in the materials produced by OFRI. I reviewed all the items listed as Lesson Plans in the Publications section.

(https://learnforests.org/resource_list/complete-list-of-resources)

A number of the “lessons” are course outlines for community college courses. I will focus on the elementary lesson plans, apparently aimed at grades 4-6 for the most part.

First, I discuss some general patterns, then offer a detailed lesson by lesson critique. Overall, there is a consistent slant in favor of the logging industry and a strong tendency to mislead students by omission. For example, none of the elementary lessons mention the dominant practice of clearcutting, although there is frequent mention of “thinning” and salvage logging. Several lessons mislead by repeated use of the term “overcrowded forests”. For example, in Lesson 2, “The Nature of Trees,” in a simple discussion of tree biology, the authors feel compelled to tuck in, on page 5’s discussion of tree rings, a suggestion that “narrow tree rings may indicate that the trees were overcrowded” and goes on to recommend logging some trees so that others can grow faster. This theme of growing trees faster shows up frequently, and is a window into the bias in favor of the logging mentality – more trees growing faster provides more to cut.

Further, the concept of being “overcrowded” is completely misleading - healthy forests are not “overcrowded”. Tree plantations may be overcrowded, but they are not forests. Certainly forests that have had fires suppressed may have a high fuel load, but that is not necessarily from too many trees.

Next, there is frequent use of explicit and implicit advocating for the logging industry. Lesson 9 in two places argues that wood products are more sustainable than steel and cement. Lesson 3 is essentially an ad for all the wonderful products that can be made from wood. Further, it refers to nature as a “treasure chest”, implying that nature is simply here for humans to open up and exploit. Is that really the message we want to send to children? (2 minutes)

I must also note other language that carries hidden messages. The word “harvest” is exclusively used instead of “cut”. “Harvest” carries the implication that trees are just a crop like wheat, again ignoring the fact that the complexity of a healthy forest is nothing like a wheat field.

Specifics for seven of the lessons:

“The Nature of Trees, Lesson 2. Even in a simple discussion of tree biology, the authors feel compelled to tuck in, on page 5’s discussion of tree rings, a suggestion that “narrow tree rings may indicate that the trees were overcrowded” and goes on to recommend logging some trees so that others can grow faster. This theme of growing trees faster shows up repeatedly, and is a window into the bias of the logging mentality – more trees growing faster provides more to cut.

“Nature’s Treasure Chest”, Lesson 3. This is essentially an advertisement for all the wonderful products that can be made from trees. But I want to focus on the repeated use of the idea that nature, or trees, more specifically, are “nature’s treasure chest.” This metaphor sends a clear message that nature is here for humans to open and exploit as we wish. It implies no responsibility to care for or respect nature, rather we can just grab it and go. A more thoughtful and balanced approach might look at what nature provides us and what responsibilities we have to live in balance with it.

“The Sustainable Forest”, Lesson 4. As is common in OFRI materials, it suggests that Oregon’s forest regulations are strong, but does not compare them with other states, some of which have much stronger regulations. The drawings on pp 4 and 6 suggest a much broader buffer zone by creeks than is required by Oregon law.

“Forest Health”, lesson 5, first compares a forest to a garden with too many seedlings. It uses this metaphor to suggest, once again, a problem of “overcrowded” forests, then argues for thinning forests as one would thin a carrot patch. A healthy climax forest, of course, is nothing like a garden. Perhaps the only “forests” that would compare to a garden are the tree plantations planted by forestry companies, which have little in common with real forests.

“Forest Families”, Lesson 7 - under Forest Safeguards (p.4), claims that “the Oregon Forest Practices Act is one of the most comprehensive regulation (sic) in the nation.” Then it adds “It encourages private forest landowners to do whatever is necessary to protect and improve forest health.” This is an unsupported claim, for which there is a great deal of counterevidence.

Further, under “Natural Disasters of the Forest” (p.7), it again repeatedly refers to “overcrowded” forests that can be solved by “harvesting” and “thinning”. Nowhere in this lesson is “overcrowded” defined, nor is the term given context by means of considering healthy forests, or even better, old growth forests.

“Forests and Water”, lesson 8, is mostly straightforward discussion of the water cycle. After a discussion of the activities of forest managers to protect watersheds (protecting from the effects of logging is the clear but unmentioned point), it offers the example of the Bull Run watershed, noting, ironically, that “53% ... has never been logged”. The implication that minimizing logging in watersheds might be a good idea is never followed up.

“Forests, Carbon and Our Climate”, Lesson 9. After a fairly straightforward discussion of the carbon cycle, it moves onto the punch lines. On page 5, it offers ways to reduce our carbon footprint, which includes “use wood products” and “decrease use of fossil fuels”, but nothing about reducing logging of healthy forests.

Then on page 8 the rest of the key messages come out:

- Deforestation “occurs primarily in tropical countries”

- “planting fast growing trees is the best way to reduce CO₂” – yet fast growing trees are often grown in plantations. What we need are real forests, with ecological complexity that supports a wide variety of life.

- “catastrophic wildfires are uncommon in managed forests” – yet it is the management that included stopping small fires that has led to the buildup of matter that feeds catastrophic fires.

- in two places it asserts without evidence that wood products are more sustainable than steel and cement, ignoring, for example, the recycling of concrete. It’s basically another ad for the wood-products industry

OFRI’s educational materials are clearly and consistently biased. If one of my teacher education students – novices - had written such lessons, he or she would have been required to rewrite them. These materials should have no place in a school curriculum. The regularity of bias suggests that OFRI is likely unable to produce appropriate curriculum. Funding for OFRI should be shifted to educational purposes that are guided by science and education, not the interests of the logging industry.