

Date: March 2, 2021

To: Chair Brad Witt, Vice-Chairs Breese-Iverson and Hudson, and Members of the House Committee on Agriculture and Natural Resources

From: Susan Watkins, 13440 SW McCabe Chapel Road, McMinnville, Oregon 97128

Re: HB 2357; Opposed

Thank you for the opportunity to address you regarding HB 2357.

My name is Susan Watkins. I live in Yamhill County. I offer these comments on behalf of small woodland owners who ask you *not* to defund OFRI.

Listening to the testimony provided this evening on this measure and HB 2379 I had the feeling that we were talking about two different organizations. There is the evil OFRI that misuses its platform to spread misinformation about forestry to the public -- and the other, good OFRI that supplies essential information, education, and support to small woodland owners.

Some of you and your colleagues in the Legislature may see OFRI as merely a mouthpiece for the timber industry. But as many landowners testified, OFRI provides much needed services to Oregon's more than 60,000 small landowners.

I have worked closely with OFRI, both as a landowner and as an advocate for small forest owners. I served for seven years on the Committee for Family Forestlands (CFF), including one year as Committee chair. The CFF is appointed by the Board of Forestry to advise that Board about matters that affect small forests. I also serve on the Board of my local Small Woodlands Association chapter.

My husband and I have 45 acres in productive forest and another nine in an oak restoration project. Like many small landowners, we bought cut-over land. Our oldest forest trees are only 27 years old. We will not live long enough to harvest them.

Like us, most of Oregon's small forest owners own less than 50 acres of forestland. Yet together we own almost a third of all private forestland in the state. Also like us, many small woodland owners knew little or nothing about forestry when they acquired their land.

Managing a healthy forest that contributes to clean air and water and provides recreational opportunities and wildlife habitat in addition to forest products requires extensive knowledge of soils, seed sources, chemicals, equipment, pests, invasives, and other threats to tree health.

Fortunately, for us and for forestry in general, OFRI offers an amazing array of data, publications, and courses for landowners. The *knowyourforest.org* website is a fantastic

resource for landowners like me, offering online classes and identifying important resources. OFRI provides this platform for the Partnership for Forestry Education as part of its statutory charge, to "[s]upport education ... to:

- (a) Practice good stewardship of the land...;
- (c) Encourage, facilitate and assist private forest landowners to meet or exceed state and federal regulations...; and
- (e) ... serve as a clearinghouse for the dissemination of information to private forest landowners, through conferences, workshops and other means, about modern land management practices." [ORS 526.640]

In addition, OFRI supports organizations like OSWA that advocate for small landowners by gathering data about forest ownerships, the problems small landowners face, and solutions to those problems.

HB 2357 would repurpose the tax dollars that support these programs and eliminate this valuable resource for small private landowners. Without OFRI, other agencies would have to expand their efforts in order to meet landowners' needs, but without OFRI's (voluntary) funding. And, although the programs that HB 2357 would support are laudable, the measure goes about funding them in the wrong way.

HB 2357 is little more than a money grab from one set of priorities to another. Forest owners have to agree to be taxed to fund OFRI; no one has asked whether landowners agree to be taxed to fund the programs identified in HB 2357. Those programs are more properly funded by general fund dollars, contributed by all Oregonians as part of the traditional public-private alliance that keeps forest land in forests so that we can all benefit.

Several speakers mentioned the audit currently being undertaken by the Secretary of State. Before this legislature acts, it needs to see the results of that audit. If OFRI requires changes, so be it, but HB 2357 is not the vehicle to accomplish that.

OFRI's educational benefits for Oregon's small woodlands owners are essential. Don't take them away.

Thank you.