



Oregon State University
College of Forestry

**Department of Forest Engineering,
Resources, & Management**

Oregon State University
280 Peavy Hall
Corvallis, Oregon 97331

P 541-737-8561

C 541-404-7356 (Preferred)

E jon.souder@oregonstate.edu

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HB 2357 Committee Testimony

Rep. Brad Witt
Chair, House Committee on Agriculture and Natural Resources
900 Court St. NE, H-382
Salem, OR 97301

Dear Representative Witt and the Committee,

I watched yesterday's hearing on HB 2357 to eliminate the Oregon Forest Resources Institute (OFRI) with considerable interest since I'm just in the finishing stages of a 3-year project funded by them. My observations here are personal, based on my experience, and should not be construed to represent my employer, Oregon State University. The study I referred to is called "Trees To Tap: Forest Management and Drinking Water" and our results, and OFRI outreach products, can be found at www.oregonforests.org/treestotap. In addition, next Thursday (3/11) afternoon and Friday (3/12) morning, we will have a virtual conference to roll out the results with panels including the scientists involved in the study, forest land managers, regulatory agencies, water utility managers, and conservation groups. I would encourage anyone interested in OFRI's current approach to join us. The agenda and registration (free) information is at: <https://www.forestry.oregonstate.edu/cpe/trees-tap-forest-management-and-drinking-water>. Within a month, we hope to have the results published as a book by OSU Extension Communications. And, I'm particularly pleased that the report will be the focus for Oregon's high school Envirothon competition whose winners will compete at the national level.


The *Trees To Tap* study was administered through OSU's Institute for Natural Resources (INR), with a broad-based Steering Committee of 10 member scientists from Federal (USEPA, USFS), state (ODF, DEQ, OHA), water utility (OAWU), forest industry (OFIC, NCASI), and conservation groups (OSP Coalition, Geos Institute). Our OFRI program manager served as an ex-officio member of the committee, as did the INR Director. The Steering Committee prioritized the four topics selected for our structured science review, approved a hierarchy of credible publication types (peer-reviewed journal articles, peer-reviewed agency reports), and reviewed multiple drafts of all the report chapters. Our literature review turned up 750 references that met our criteria, and the scientist chapter authors synthesized and distilled these into chapters related to the four topics: changes in water quantity and timing, sediment and turbidity, forest chemicals, and natural organic matter/disinfection by-products. Additionally, we surveyed the 156 community water suppliers (CWS) that rely on surface water as their primary source, and conducted three case studies for examples of these organizations. Presciently, we were also able to enlist scientists from the U.S. Forest Service to conduct fire transmission risk modeling for each of the 156 CWSs. While we were not asked to evaluate the effectiveness of the Oregon Forest Practices Act and its regulations to protect drinking water, we did provide a set of Findings and Recommendations.

When OFRI approached the College of Forestry in late 2017 to conduct the study, I was initially apprehensive due to their reputation, although I had worked with them previously on fish passage and forest road workshops. I wanted to make sure that if I was involved in a study funded by them, that we would have the independence needed to create a credible product. And, I wanted confirmation that their proposal was not a response to a DEQ document on the water quality effects of forest practices that had generated bad publicity when it was refuted by the Department of Forestry. The response by OFRI was that in their surveying of the Oregon public's attitudes towards forestry, their biggest concern was water quality. At that time, and throughout the project, they said "we're interested in understanding the science, and if it shows that improved practices are needed then we will work to help revise them."

During the course of the project I met with the OFRI Board on two occasions to provide status updates (and explain why it was taking longer than expected). The Board members were obviously interested in our findings, since this was the most expensive study they'd funded (\$120,000) and there was lots in the news related to forestry, particularly about forest chemical use. However, they were understanding when I said they'd see the results as they were publically available. When OFRI was drafting the Special Report, "Keeping Drinking Water Safe," I was provided multiple opportunities to review the draft to make sure that our Trees to Tap results were precisely reported, including the good and the bad. I was ultimately satisfied with the results. That interaction was consistent with the pattern of my relations with OFRI on this project: they'd request something, and if I didn't feel it was appropriate I'd push back and they'd accept my decision. I don't consider this out of the ordinary for projects of this type with any funding sponsor.

I have found the OFRI staff that I'm currently working with to be professional, hardworking, and committed to improving the management of Oregon's forests. And, I think what we accomplished together in the *Trees To Tap* project is an example of OFRI's current direction. I'd be happy to provide additional information and testimony if desired.

Cordially,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Jon A. Souder". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping initial "J".

Jon A. Souder, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor & Specialist, Forest Watershed Extension
Oregon State University