

## Examining OFRI's Claims: Does Oregon have Strong Logging Laws?

On August 4, 2020, *The Oregonian-OPB-ProPublica* published a report exposing the Oregon Forest Resources Institute (OFRI) for suppressing science on carbon, downplaying the impacts of industrial forestry on Oregon's drinking water supplies, and engaging in illegal lobbying efforts. This brief looks at Oregon Forest Resources Institute's misleading messaging about Oregon logging practices and highlights the problematic way in which their literature, advertising, and activities present the biased notion that Oregon protects the environment with landmark forestry laws.



OFRI attempts to influence public perception by releasing television advertisements that promote Oregon as a state with strong logging laws. In one advertisement, Bob and Kirk, “Third and fourth generation Oregon Loggers,” “remind people that Oregon has strong laws that help protect our watersheds.” Another television advertisement features a woman in a lush forest praising her father’s work as a logger. A voiceover conveys a similar message to the one Bob and Kirk articulated: “If you love trees, you’ve got to love Oregon. We have strong laws that protect our forests, water, animals and fish, and make sure new trees are planted after harvest.” Again, the messaging supports the idea that Oregon has strong timber laws. However, an article by *The Oregonian-OPB-ProPublica* publicized that “timber companies have successfully fought to keep Oregon’s laws much more lenient than neighboring states.”

Oregon’s Department of Environmental Quality doesn’t have the authority to limit pollution caused by logging, while Washington’s Department of Ecology does. Eric Harlow of the Washington Forest Law Center conducted a “comparison of Oregon & Washington Forest Practice Rules” and found that “Washington requires buffers to maintain sufficient shade along fish bearing streams, [while] Oregon buffers along fish bearing streams are recognized to be insufficient to prevent water temperature increases.” Washington allows a minimum of a fifty-foot buffer on streams that hold drinking water and protects steep slopes from logging to prevent landslides, erosion, and silting. In California, buffers must be at least thirty feet. By contrast, Oregon only requires a twenty-foot no-cut buffer and small, non-fish bearing streams (even if they feed into fish-bearing streams) have no buffers whatsoever.

Furthermore, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and the EPA have denied Oregon annual funding since 2016 because state timber regulations don’t do enough to protect the environment. *Oregonian-OPB-ProPublica* found that Oregon was the only state to lose out on nearly \$5 million in funding for its inadequate forestry regulations. OFRI responds to weak forestry laws, not by adhering to their mission of “advancing public understanding” about the issue, but by presenting the public with a false notion — that Oregon’s laws are good the way they are and more logging can be safely done.

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What's worse, OFRI doesn't promote the narrative that Oregon has top-notch forestry laws out of ignorance, they mislead the public knowingly. In 2016, Timm Locke, OFRI's former forest products director, discouraged employee, Inka Bajandas, from writing a blog post to compare Oregon's logging laws with those of neighboring states because "[c]ertain elements... are not quite as strong" as in Washington or California.

Under new leadership, the institute replaced the phrase "strong laws" with the theme that Oregon manages its forests responsibly and protects drinking water, *The Oregonian-OPB-ProPublica* reported. However, this theme isn't any less biased than the original message that Oregon has strong laws. Unsurprisingly, Oregon's weak laws lead to weak forestry practices. In 2013, health officials studied the communities near Triangle Lake and found low levels of toxic herbicides in drinking water, air, and resident's urine. And in 2019, a timber company clear-cut thousands of trees in Corbett, leaving only a single row of trees to protect a creek that was one of only two sources of drinking water for the town. Due to mud, herbicides, and exposure to the sun, the creek dropped too low to provide water. This situation left Corbett vulnerable: 3,000 people were forced to rely on the one remaining creek. Logging practices have also affected water in Arch Cape, Wheeler, and Rockaway Beach.

When OFRI isn't claiming that Oregon has "strong laws" or responsibly managed forests, they promote another misleading message: that Oregon has made tremendous progress. OFRI's "Trees To Tap" report begins with a message from the report's principal investigator, Jon Souder: "there's been a huge evolution in forestry practices over the past 60 years. There are still things to be concerned about, but they are different and orders of magnitude less impactful on the environment." This selective emphasis focuses on progress without recognizing current issues. *The Oregonian-OPB-ProPublica* article revealed that "Oregon legislators have failed to change logging laws that state regulators, scientists and the federal government say are insufficient to protect clean water," which refutes the idea of a "huge evolution in forestry practices."

The reason why Oregon doesn't have advanced laws is because of OFRI itself. The OPB podcast, "Timber Wars," reports that "Part of the reason that Oregon's logging regulations are weaker than our neighbors is that despite the fact that timber companies employ far fewer people and contribute far less to their local economies than they did back in the 80s, they've managed to hold onto much of their status and influence. And they've done that with the help of an obscure public agency called the Oregon Forest Resources Institute."

OFRI spends millions of dollars of taxpayer money to feed the public biased information. Oregonians deserve better. Instead of using harvest taxes to fund the narratives that falsely presents Oregon's forestry practices as strong, we should redirect money to neutral agencies that support teacher training, outdoor education and taking care of our forests, rivers and drinking water sources.

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