

18 March 2021

To Committee Chair Golden, Vice Chair Heard and members of the Senate Committee on Natural Resources and Wildfire Recovery:

I offer this letter in opposition to SB 335-3.

My wife and I are small woodland owners whose property burned in the Holiday Farm Fire. Both as forest owner-manager-stewards and as individuals very personally and negatively impacted by the catastrophic fires that battered our state in 2020, we have a clear stake in decisions that will impact our ability to adequately care for and sustainably manage our battered property. As non-experts in forestry, we are keenly aware of the invaluable role of trained foresters in the process of making management decisions that impact both the short- and long-term health of our forests—not only our particular forest, but all of Oregon’s forests. Expertise and experience are not things to be lightly dismissed or discounted. A love of forests does not easily translate into expertise in forest health, forest resilience or forest management. That love needs to be undergirded by training, by science and by experience.

That said, even considering a reduction in the number of *foresters* on the Oregon Board of *Forestry* is of great concern to us. Including a small woodland owner on the Board is a great idea, but that should be in addition to trained foresters. Additionally concerning is the elimination of the three Regional Forest Practice Committees, which reeks of seeking to eliminate the voices of people directly knowledgeable about their part of the state. Why would the Board of Forestry not want to learn from people who know their patches of forest better than people who live and work elsewhere? What could possibly be gained by ignoring the experience of folks with boots-on-the-ground experience?

Lastly, shifting the selection of the State Forester from the Board of Forestry to the Governor seems both an unnecessary burden on the Governor and a further politicization of the role—which will not serve Oregon’s forests so much as those with political agendas *related to* Oregon’s forests.

Forests, foresters, forest landowners and the forest products industry are vital to the health of rural economies, our state economy and our state itself. Further driving wedges between people of different “interest” groups rather than seeking to learn from the broadest range of experts seems misguided, particularly at this juncture. The forestry “conversation” in Oregon is divided and divisive enough. Why exacerbate it? Wouldn’t it be more sensible to have more voices at the table, more experience rather than less, more emphasis on what we can learn from one another’s concerns—and then work on building consensus from there? Last year’s MOU was such a positive and hopeful step forward—why the backward steps now?

On behalf of my small forest and all of Oregon’s forests, I thank you for including the above testimony in your deliberations.

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