

To: [Senate Committee On Natural Resources and Wildfire Recovery](#)
Date: March 31, 2021
Re: SB 335 (OPPOSED)
From: Susan Watkins, land owner, rural Yamhill County, Oregon

Chair Golden, Vice-Chair Heard, and Committee members:

I OPPOSE SB 335.

SB 335 and other proposed legislation represent a convoluted effort to reshape the Board of Forestry so that it can balance interests that are not actually in conflict. Oregon would be better served by two boards, a Public Forests Board and a private timberlands oversight board.

I have been involved in forestry policy on behalf of small landowners for many years, serving two terms on the Committee for Family Forestry, a Board of Forestry advisory committee, and an additional year as its acting chair. I am also a Board member of my county Small Woodlands Association chapter. My husband and I own a small forest in rural Yamhill County.

The impetus behind SB 335 and many other bills introduced in this and previous sessions appears to conflate management of public forests and management of private timber lands. State forests should be managed with public values in mind. But private landowners have many objectives.

Commercial timber lands are managed as crop lands with the goal of producing products for sale. While management of these lands should and must align with the public interest in clean air and water, there is no reason to require private owners to manage their lands in the same way as state forests or for the same objectives.

The objectives of Oregon's 60,000 small woodland owners fall between those of public lands and commercial timber interests. Polls have shown that most small landowners value forest aesthetics, including creation and maintenance of wildlife habitat and family recreational opportunities, above commercial interests, but a substantial proportion regularly harvest timber and other products from their land. This diversity of interests actually increases the biodiversity of Oregon's woodlands, a benefit that is undercut by imposing state public land values on small forests.

Rather than trying to reshape the Board of Forestry to favor public interests by limiting input from private landowners, you should instead consider creating two distinct Boards of Forestry: one to manage state forestlands for public interests and a second to oversee activities on private lands undertaken for private purposes.

The public lands Board should have at least one appointed ex officio member to represent the timber industry, because there will be timber sales on public lands (salvage logging following 2020's Labor Day fires is a good example) and industry expertise will be essential to good decision-making. The private lands Board should have a majority of landowners, divided between commercial interests and small ownerships, similar to the state Board of Agriculture.

A key state interest in small woodlands is keeping the land forested. Binding small forests to public lands goals and management practices may discourage landowners from maintaining their forestland--which is often located near populated areas--and increase pressures to rezone those lands for uses less likely to protect our air, water, and biodiversity. Developing separate standards for private lands can increase interest in forest ownership, reduce the perceived conflicts between public and private goals, and promote healthy land management.