

April 6th, 2021

**Testimony on HB 2594
Directing the Department of Forestry to Better Protect
Community Drinking Water Supplies**

Chair Helm and Members of the House Committee on Water,

My name is Samantha Krop and I am the Coalitions Coordinator for the Forest Waters Coalition, a growing network of conservation voices and grassroots community members working to gain stronger protections for Oregon's forested waterways. I am here to testify on House Bill 2594.

I testified before this committee during the March 18th hearing in support of this, stating that it was a small step in the right direction; however after further reviewing the -2 (and now -3) amendments, I return to you today with a request to please redirect this effort into legislation that can be more effective at materially protecting community drinking water supplies. To be clear, it is imperative that we do something to enhance protections for drinking water supplies. This spirit of this bill is in the right place, but the letter fails to address this issue at its core.

With the current amendments, this bill would simply reinforce an existing relationship between the Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) and the Oregon Department of Forestry (ODF) that has so far not been effective at protecting drinking water for communities across the state. The existing laws today already requires that the DEQ review whether ODF's forest practices meet water quality standards. The DEQ already has the power to require ODF to enforce sound management practices and to mandate that ODF update their rules if they are found to be not in compliance. The issue is that the DEQ has thus far not exercised this full authority. We would like to empower the DEQ to take more of a leadership role in this process, but it is clear that simply reinforcing the existing relationship is not sufficient.

In the past couple decades, more than thirty communities have contacted the Department of Environmental Quality with concerns about logging in their drinking watersheds, but these pleas have mostly gone unanswered. In my work with the Forest Waters Coalition, I have heard these stories and know them well. This bill in its current form would not address the fundamental issue at hand, which is that the current agencies responsible for protecting drinking water are not doing their job. To create

redundancies in the same bureaucratic process ensures a perpetuation of this problem, rather than a much needed solution.

Oregon's current forest practices allow corporations to clearcut vast areas right across steep headwater streams and within 20 feet of drinking water sources. Cities like Arch Cape, Corbett and Rockaway Beach have already been forced to spend millions of dollars for treatment facilities due to the impacts of industrial logging. Under the current rules, coastal communities are seeing their entire watersheds targeted for industrial logging within the space of years.

Section 6 of the -3 amendment would offer a promising opportunity for watersheds to secure greater site-specific protections outside of a rule-change or OFPA reform, however communities would be required to prove that logging activities pose a "serious risk" to their water supplies. The bar for determining whether an action is a "serious risk" is not defined, and for many living in rural communities without access to the resources to conduct independent studies, seems like an unreachable bar. In too many cases we are unable to conclusively prove the lasting deleterious effects of industrial logging until the damage is done.

Those who claim that this is a simple neighbor to neighbor issue, or an issue for just one water supply, are speaking over the voices of those across Oregon who live within heavily clearcut watersheds and have been asking, for decades, for change.

Our communities need legislation with teeth. We need legislation that a) gives water managers more authority to protect their surface drinking water supplies, and b) incentivizes land managers to come to the table and adopt better practices, or otherwise sell their land to the public. Currently, neither of these criterion are met by the proposed legislation.

The bottom line is: drinking water can't wait. We know that future decades promise warmer, drier conditions and greater challenges for our forests, waterways and our communities. As the Oregon Department of Forestry stays its course of clearcuts as usual, it is time for our leaders in Salem to take a stand for our collective, enduring, and most priceless resource—our drinking water.

Thank you for your public service and for the time to testify today.

Sincerely,
Samantha Krop
Forest Waters Coalition

