



May 10, 2021

To: House Committee on Revenue

From: Oregon Association of Conservation Districts (OACD)

Re: **Oppose HB 2357A – Oregon Forest Resources Institute Revisions**

Chair Nathanson and Members of the Committee:

OACD represents Oregon's 45 soil and water conservation districts (SWCDs), which are special districts governed by county wide elected boards. SWCDs protect and enhance soil quality, water quality and quantity, and habitat by supporting voluntary conservation in partnership with private landowners, managers, and others as well as federal, state, and nonprofit partners.

OACD opposes HB 2357A, which proposes changes to the purpose and funding of the Oregon Forest Resources Institute (OFRI). While we acknowledge that there have been serious concerns about some actions and bias of OFRI in the past and that change is needed, HB 2357A takes a splintered approach to addressing these concerns and will create inefficiencies in the delivery of school, landowner and general public education about Oregon's forests.

Let's begin by focusing on the strengths of OFRI. Oregon is fortunate to have a dedicated tax base levied as a small value assessed per unit of the volume of timber harvested for the purpose of providing education about Oregon's forests and this tax mechanism in many ways is an envy of our neighboring states. With this consolidated funding, OFRI's professional staff of environmental educators, media specialists, foresters and wildlife biologists provide valuable resources and tools for family forestland owner, K-12 school and general public education. SWCDs value and use these resources in our conservation programs and we value OFRI's use of partnerships to develop this information and resources about Oregon's forests. Specific examples highly valued by SWCDs are OFRI's financial support for the [Oregon Envirothon](#), OFRI's hosting of the "[Know Your Forests](#)" website and the plethora of [publications and fact sheets](#) about Oregon's Forests.

At a minimum we feel that HB 2357A should further be amended to eliminate the creation of the Family Forestlands Subaccount within the Oregon Department of Forestry and keep these funds within OFRI so as to retain family forestland education as central to OFRI's mission. The Oregon Department of Forestry, Oregon State University's Forestry and Natural Resources Extension Service and many other state, federal and non-governmental organizations rely on this centralized role as illustrated by OFRI's facilitation of Oregon's [Partnership in Forestry Education](#). We also feel that OFRI's balance and improved governance would best be served by incorporating the more sweeping changes to the OFRI voting board as proposed by SB 828 into HB 2357A and further encourage at least one of SB 828's public interest voting members be someone representing a conservation perspective. Finally, we encourage that the more robust mission of OFRI as defined in SB 828 be incorporated into HB 2357A.

In summary, let's work together to chart a new course in education about Oregon forests by preserving OFRI's strengths while at the same time incorporating needed balance in the make-up of OFRI's board. This can only be accomplished through needed improvements to HB 2357A.

Jim Cathcart, Member

Oregon Association of Conservation Districts