

Chair Nancy Nathanson, Vice Chairs Khan Pham and E. Werner Reschke, and Committee Members:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify opposing HB 2357. My name is Annabelle Morgan and I live in Washington County with forestland in Lincoln County. As you are aware, knowledge is the key to making informed decisions and only comes through personal experience and fact-based education beginning as a child and developing through adulthood. Funded through Forest Harvest Tax Revenue and no general funds, OFRI is the forest industries Commodity Commission, supporting the forest industry, the backbone of rural communities and income for over 60,000 family jobs, and funds educational materials and programs especially important as the chasm between rural and urban knowledge of science based management of our natural resources grows. Most public educators have neither background nor funding to teach Natural Resource classes. OFRI fulfills that role. It partners with OSU Forestry Research projects, develops and distributes colorful, factual educational materials and lesson plans, and has conducted workshops for 1000 teachers on maintaining healthy forests and environment through compliance with the Oregon Forest Practices Act it administers. OFRI educational programs are essential. 21% of their budget is allocated to K-12 education with 56% allocated to all educational programs. As a former teacher, I have seen how one small bit of information, often through hands-on experiences and field trips, can open a new world to students and spark their interest, motivating them to become more successful as they pursue that interest and gain skills and confidence to continue further education. Unlike my parents' generation and mine who grew in rural settings and developed a passion for farming and improving forestlands, those who live in concrete jungles disconnected from the agrarian life cannot understand and appreciate the investment, work, replanting expenses, and constant management and battling ice, drought, wildfires, diseases, invasive species and animals such as deer, elk, bear, and voles, mountain beavers, paying for pre-commercial thinning which brings no profit but is necessary to healthy forests while protecting fish and wildlife and maintaining pristine, clean water. It is only through educational opportunities and materials that children have the opportunity to learn about and value natural resources. OFRI-sponsored classroom and field-based education has enabled 170,000 Oregon students to experience these educational opportunities first-hand. These programs reach out to all income levels of students; 60% of fourth sixth grade students who visited the OFRI sponsored Rediscovery Forest at Oregon Gardens were from underserved, low income, students of Title 1 schools whose students are in most need of awakening to new means of breaking the cycle of entitlement and poverty. Conducting in-class programs for approximately 100,000 Oregon students and forestry education workshops for approximately 1000 teachers in 2019 and in addition funding the cost of transportation for field trips focusing on forestry related studies expands children's worlds and their understanding of the value promoting forest practices which benefit all Oregonians today and in the future. It partners with OSU Extension funding adult workshops, including over 20 Tree School Online Webinars including the "Firewise Program" to assist fire-impacted forestland owners with determining salvageable timber and connecting with agencies to assist with clean up, replanting, and rebuilding and for all adults interested in mitigating fire hazards in rural and urban areas to maintain Oregon's healthy environment. Eliminating OFRI and re-directing Forest Product Tax funds from it to the Dept. of Forestry is unfair. Upcoming results of the Secretary of State's performance audit needs to be considered before any legislative actions should be considered. Please oppose HB2357A.