

To Chair Nathanson and members of the House Committee on Revenue:

As a retired researcher and public health professional, I am offering this testimony in support of HB 2357. HB 2357 is needed to correct misinformation and distorted actions repeatedly taken by the Oregon Forest Resources Institute (OFRI) on behalf of timber companies. Using tax-funded revenues, OFRI is distorting science, providing misleading "educational" materials to our schools and the general public, and thereby, helping to destroy our forests through support of clear-cutting and other outdated practices. Sadly, this is exactly the opposite of what we should be doing to address climate challenges; modern research has shown that mature forests are much better able to sequester unwanted carbon than young trees planted as replacement after clearcutting. I support the idea of prohibiting OFRI from engaging in "generalized advertising for public education." Through this activity, OFRI is spending millions of dollars annually to purchase TV, radio, and digital media advertising supporting the timber industry agenda, including dishonestly suggesting the Oregon is a leader in environmentally sound forestry and ignoring contrary information. Even worse, OFRI has attempted to interfere with academic freedom of a team conducting ground-breaking forestry-climate research at Oregon State University's College of Forestry.

OFRI's behavior as a tax-funded public organization is problematic. While OFRI presents itself as a government agency, the organization is political and dominated by members of the timber industry who are involved in and dependent on clear-cutting and other detrimental timber practices for their own success. Public employees at OFRI participated in an election campaign briefing that featured political attack ads against Governor Brown from dark money group Priority Oregon. As a publicly funded organization, Oregon law prohibits OFRI from lobbying. Yet, OFRI has worked to lobby against climate change legislation and stronger logging regulations to protect clean water and communities.

Going forward, Oregon's interest would be better served by:

1. Science-based forestry management educational materials for K-12 that look through the lens of climate smart forestry. Students learning about Oregon's forests need to know the amount of carbon that our forests can and do store naturally, and how benefits from carbon sequestration factor into overall plans for timber harvesting and forest stewardship. Removing OFRI's role as middleman for forestry curriculum and outdoor educational programs would be a good step towards ensuring our students and the public have access to independent, modern, science-backed curriculum and outdoor educational programs. Good policy needs public support, based on honest information.
2. Transparency in use of public funds. Millions for self-serving advertisement and spending resources trying to undermine scientists or politicians is not a good use of public funds.

By representing Big Timber's agenda, and distorting or trying to disrupt independent science, OFRI has discredited itself and lost its social license. We need independent, truthful scientific information being provided to all Oregonians on the critical issues of climate change and forest management, and policies based on the best available INDEPENDENT science. We should have learned our lessons about science-denial from the Tobacco industry, already. That industry obfuscated and lied about clear science for years in order to protect their own interests, to the great detriment of States as well as individuals.

As the old adage warns, the safety of the chickens is doubtful when you put the fox in charge of watching the hen house.

Yours sincerely,
Evelyn P. Whitlock, M.D., M.P.H.