

**Written Testimony asking Improvements in HB 2379**  
**House Committee on Agriculture and Natural Resources**  
**Public Hearing and Work Session**  
**February 25, 2021**

I am submitting this Testimony today on behalf of the Columbia County Democratic Central Committee where I am the current Chair. I also have professional expertise in forest practices, water quality, drinking water protection, and watershed health. I retired from DEQ in 2014 where I spent 38 years, much of which assessing water quality status, trends, sources of impairment, and effectiveness of pollution control programs, including the effectiveness of the Oregon Forest Practices requirements. I was the Manager of the DEQ Water Quality Monitoring Section and Administrator of the Laboratory and Environmental Assessment Division. I served on the National Governor's Association Task force on Non-Point Source Pollution and the Executive Board of the National Water Quality Monitoring Council. I am a board member and past President of the Scappoose Bay Watershed Council.

In Oregon, the timber industry has successfully fought to keep Oregon's laws much more lenient than neighboring states adversely impacting, drinking water sources, salmonid populations, and local economies. Who has benefited? The answer is Wall Street. In Columbia County Weyerhaeuser owns 140,405 acres of industrial timberland. More than the other industrial timberland owners combined. In 2020 Weyerhaeuser net profits were a record shattering 797 million dollars. Over the last 30 years we have seen a massive transfer of the economic benefits of the timber industry in Oregon from our local communities to Wall Street investors. Mills have been shut down, logs exported to Asia, jobs lost to automation, harvest rotations shortened, and fair taxes avoided all to maximize investor profits.

Columbia County Democrats are urging you to amend HB 2379 as follows so it will foster; better protection of drinking water supplies, sustainable forest management practices, improved watershed health and the salmonid populations that depend on it, and lost timber revenues to county governments:

1. **Return 60% of timber harvest tax to counties.** For over 70 years Oregon's timber counties budgets received critical revenue from timber harvest taxes. In 1997, the earliest year for which data is available, Columbia County received \$3,136,000 in severance tax. At that time, the severance tax was already being phased out. The tax should be based on value of logs, not volume. Estimates of a 6.5 % tax at a similar harvest level for the county in 2020 dollars at a 60% distribution would be \$6,268,000.
2. **Enhance Drinking water protection.** Drinking water sources are being adversely impacted by current logging practices (Corbett, Rockaway, Oceanside, Wheeler, Arch Cape). Logging practices increase sediment runoff into streams, which leads to higher costs of water treatment plants and create cancer causing byproducts when towns use chemicals to disinfect dirtier water. Current Forest Practices Act requirements shield timber harvesters from damages that may result from logging practices. DEQ should be given the authority to analyze how current forest practices are adversely impacting drinking water quality and what can be done to improve protections.

3. **Provide funding to Water Districts for mitigating adverse water quality impacts:** Funding should be allocated to help pay for water treatment, or alternative water sources where drinking water quality is adversely impacted by logging practices.
4. **Allocate funding for counties to prepare and direct protections from Wildfire.**

In conclusion, Columbia County values and appreciates the critical importance of the forest products industry to our identity and our economic welfare. Generations of our residents have worked in our woods and our mills. Columbia County Democrats want a vibrant and economically viable timber industry to continue in our county. We also know we can improve our forest practices to better protect drinking water, improve watershed health, prevent and respond to wildfires, and provide much needed revenue to our counties. It is not one or the other, we can have both.

Thank you for consideration of our comments,

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