

COLUMBIA COUNTY

Board of Commissioners Office

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February 23, 2021

Re: Opposition to HB 2070, HB 2357, HB 2598, HB 2430, HB 2389, and HB 2379

Dear Chair Witt and Honorable Members of the House Committee on Agriculture and Natural Resources:

Taxation of timber and forestland is a very important subject in Columbia County. Seventy-seven percent of the 688 square miles of Columbia County is forestland. Ninety-four percent of this is under private ownership. The current program of timber taxation in Oregon was developed over a period of time, with input from all stakeholders including counties, local governments, and industry. Any changes need to be thoughtfully developed by an interim working group of stakeholders. This is not the time to pass new taxes on an industry that has continued to operate and to provide much needed family wage jobs with benefits during a period when many local businesses have been unable to be open due to the pandemic.

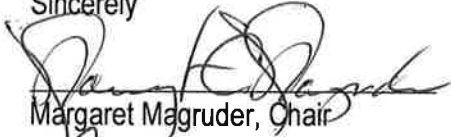
Since the bulk of timberland in Columbia County is privately-owned there are limited opportunities for our residents to access outdoor recreational areas; this is why we are currently working with these private landowners on partnerships that will provide limited public access and enhance recreational opportunities in our County for hiking, equestrian access, and other potential uses. Legislation such as proposed may have a negative impact on our ability to further these discussions.

These bills propose to divert tax collections from local governments to other purposes, including the State General Fund. Property taxes are reserved for funding local governments and any reinstatement of severance tax should be restricted to local government. Legislation should also reflect that Western Oregon timber and Eastern Oregon timber are different and should be treated differently.

The timber industry is already preparing and adjusting to new costs brought on by Oregon's recent gross receipts tax and new regulations that may arise from the Oregon Department of Forestry's Habitat Conservation Plan. The 2021 Session of the Oregon Legislature is clearly not the time to pass additional legislation that may have potential negative economic impact. We need to take the time to develop a method that helps rather than hurts our communities.

Our timber owners continue to support a significant number of family wage jobs in Columbia County. They are working with us to increase much-needed public access for outdoor recreation. They are the backbone of Columbia County. The current economic conditions in Oregon brought about by the pandemic, the catastrophic effects of the wildfires, and the recent weather impacts are all sound reasons to oppose the creation of new taxes and regulations. We urge you to oppose these bills.

Sincerely



Margaret Magruder, Chair



Casey Garrett, Commissioner



Henry Heimuller, Commissioner