

To whom it may concern,

I am writing to you because of the proposed bills that will result in the defunding of the Oregon Forest Resources Institute. As a child, I grew up on twenty acres of timber deferral land and across from hillsides of BLM land. My exposure and experience with the forests of Oregon has always been one of appreciation both for the beauty and the environmental necessity of maintaining them well. And yet, even with this background and awareness, I was under-educated on the specifics of what that process entailed and how intricately my choices as a hiker, camper, explorer, and citizen impacts the sustainability of our forests. My first field trip to Port Blakely was just as eye opening for me as it was for my students and the parents that came along to chaperone. This educational opportunity would not have been possible without the funding provided by OFRI.

As an educator, I have taken my students on numerous field trips, but rarely have I seen such engagement, wonder, and true learning as the field trip we took through this forest. The opportunity was a result of OFRI funding, and I can guarantee will have a long-term impact on the way those students view and interact with the forests they explore both now and in the future. I saw my students and their parents learn about the health and wellbeing of forests, about the ecosystems they support and provide, and about the responsible management of forests. In a society where trees are often seen as lumber waiting to be milled, we need citizens who understand the delicate balance required to do this sustainably so that we are able to continue logging and enjoying our forests for years to come. This will not happen without programs which are supported by OFRI and provided to students, teachers, and families such as:

- **The Oregon Natural Resources Education Program** at OSU that provides free professional development for natural resources education to teachers across Oregon
- **Talk About Trees**, an in-class forestry education program for pre-K through eighth grades that reaches more than 100,000 students annually.
- **Forests Today & Forever** that offers experiential outdoor programs for youth and adults, using working tree farms and other managed forests.
- **The Rediscovery Forest at the Oregon Garden** that provides K-12 students an opportunity to discover the importance of Oregon's forests, see forest management and understand how forests contribute to our quality of life.

I am urging you to vote no on HB 2357, 2379 and 2598 as these seek to either defund or eliminate the Oregon Forest Resources Institute. Either of these actions would be incredibly detrimental to the opportunities Oregon's students will have to engage with nature in a way that supports state standards while expanding their knowledge into a real, tangible environment. Our students need us to fight for the opportunities that take them outside the classroom and develop an appreciation for nature. Most field trips that teachers can afford are those with external funding, and if OFRI is unable to continue providing that, these critical learning opportunities will slowly be lost for cheaper, less valuable field trip opportunities.

Sincerely,  
Krystal Wakefield  
4<sup>th</sup> Grade Elementary Teacher