

Please Oppose HB2379.

Dear Chair Witt,

I'm writing to you today to encourage you to vote NO on HB 2379, HB 2598 and HB 2389 that raise taxes on the timber industry. I have been a practicing forester for nearly 20 years in Southwest Oregon and I am deeply concerned about the intent of these bills. I spent 15 days fighting fire on the Archie Creek fire and watched thousands upon thousands of acres burn to a crisp. Now we are in the recovery process. Just like the homeowners who lost everything, forestland owners have to rebuild; we need to replace roads, infrastructure and the trees. Imposing a tax on our industry will do irreputable harm to our lands, our employees and our communities.

Now is the worst possible time for a new timber tax. Rural communities cannot afford another tax. Timber jobs and businesses are the economic backbone of rural Oregon – the industry provides over 60,000 family wage jobs in Oregon, mostly in rural communities. In 2020, these communities have endured massive layoffs and the worst wildfires in Oregon history and are struggling to recover and rebuild. A new tax on timber will eliminate jobs and businesses in rural communities that are already suffering multiple extreme hardships. That's why 64% of Oregonians oppose new taxes and regulations on businesses struggling to recover from the economic devastation of the pandemic. Our focus should remain on restoring hundreds of thousands of acres of burned forests back to healthy, thriving forests that prevent future fires, protect water quality, and capture and store carbon – NOT taxing the very people doing that work.

Finally, keeping forests as forests is in the best interest of all Oregonians, and our current tax and land use systems work together to encourage forestland is maintained in Oregon and not lost to conversion like has happened in our neighboring states. Since 1907, Oregon has maintained 94% of its forestland area, whereas Washington and California have lost over 15% of their forestland to development. Reinstating a severance tax encourages conversion of forestland to other uses (residential, industrial, agricultural) that do not provide environmental benefits like carbon capture and storage, wildlife habitat, clean water, and recreation. Severance taxes are for "severed resources" like coal and crude oil, not a crop that is planted and cultivated over time. State law requires harvested timber be replanted – on average four trees are planted for every one that is harvested.

I urge you to please vote no on these detrimental bills. Piling on new taxes to the communities devastated by the wildfires who are trying to recover and do restoration work won't bring our forests back.

Thank you,  
Brennan Garrelts