



March 1, 2021

To: House Committee on Agriculture and Natural Resources

From: Oregon Association of Conservation Districts (OACD)

Re: **Oppose HB 2357 – Elimination of the Oregon Forest Resources Institute**

Chair Witt and Committee Members,

The Oregon Association of Conservation Districts (OACD) opposes HB 2357 which would eliminate the Oregon Forest Resources Institute (OFRI). OACD represents Oregon's 45 Soil and Water Conservation Districts, which are special districts governed by county wide elected boards. The Districts protect and enhance soil quality, water quality and quantity, and habitat by supporting voluntary conservation in partnership with private landowners, managers, and others as well as federal, state, and nonprofit partners.

Eliminating OFRI would be a mistake as it can effectively meet its mission. Conservation districts value OFRI as it works through partnerships to develop information and resources and serve as a central clearing house for access to information about Oregon's forests. OFRI provides valuable resources and tools for landowner education, kindergarten through 12th grade education and general public education. Specific examples highly valued by Districts are OFRI's financial support for the [Oregon Envirothon](#), OFRI's hosting of the Partnership for Forestry Education's ["Know Your Forests" website](#) and the plethora of [publications and fact sheets](#) about all aspects of Oregon's Forests.

We acknowledge that some people have concerns with OFRI. For OFRI to have credibility with all audiences and perspectives regarding Oregon's forests it needs to operate with less influence from the forest products industry. Central to OFRI's mission is providing information for individuals to decide for themselves what to think on key issues. OFRI needs to discipline and strengthen itself by providing highly objective information even when some of this information may make some within the forest products industry uncomfortable. OFRI's voting board and governance is currently skewed to representatives from the forest products industry. As such, OACD believes that OFRI's board and governance can be strengthened similar to the changes being proposed by Senator Dembrow in SB 828.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide our input.

Jan Lee, Executive Director
Oregon Association of Conservation Districts

Phone: (503) 545-9420 * P.O. Box 1809, Sandy, OR 97301
jan.lee@oacd.org <http://oacd.org>