

March 2, 2021

House Committee on Agriculture and Natural Resources

Chair Witt, Co-chairs Breese-Iverson and Hudson, and members of the committee:

My name is Paul Barnum. I served as OFRI's executive director for 10 years, from 2008 to 2018.

I am writing in opposition to House Bill 2357, which proposes eliminating the Oregon Forest Resources Institute and Fund. This is a radical proposal that will not improve the content, delivery or cost-effectiveness of forestry education in Oregon.

For 30 years, OFRI has proved its effectiveness as a forestry education agency. This work is as important now as it was three decades ago, perhaps even more so given population growth and urbanization. It's vital that both rural and urban residents have access to forestry education. Landowner funds have been well-managed and used for the purposes set by the Legislature in 1991. Public oversight is well-defined. Eliminating OFRI will be of no benefit to the citizens of Oregon or forest landowners.

OFRI'S MISSION COVERS ALL FOREST RESOURCES, as it engages Oregonians about the benefits we need and enjoy: timber, water, fish and wildlife habitat, carbon capture, recreation, beauty, and inspiration. To do that, the institute addresses three primary audiences: the general public, landowners, and K-12 students and teachers. The agency relies on publications, tours, classroom visits, community outreach presentations, landowner workshops, broadcast advertising and increasingly, digital and social media including websites, blogs, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and YouTube. All of the organization's printed materials are provided free of charge and can also be downloaded or viewed on the [Internet](#).

K-12 EDUCATION IS A VITAL ASPECT OF OFRI'S WORK. In addition to its own publications, videos and dedicated website for teachers, [LearnForests.org](#), OFRI provides support for many other K-12 forestry education organizations, including:

- **The Oregon Natural Resources Education Program** through Oregon State University Extension provides free professional development in natural resources education to Oregon teachers
- **Forests Today & Forever** in Lane and Linn Counties offers experiential outdoor programs for youth and adults, using working tree farms and other managed forests
- **The Rediscovery Forest** at the Oregon Garden gives K-8 students an opportunity to learn about Oregon's forests, see forest management and understand how forests contribute to our quality of life.

Without OFRI or other substantial financial support, these and other programs will be in jeopardy.

FOREST LANDOWNERS NEED EDUCATION, especially the estimated 60,000 mostly rural family forestland owners who own between 10 and 5,000 acres and who make up roughly one half of private forestland ownership in the state.

- OFRI led development of the [Partnership for Forestry Education](#), a collaboration of state, federal and private organizations dedicated to educating forest landowners about sustainable forestry
- In collaboration with the partnership, OFRI offers a variety of online resources on a website built specifically for small forest landowners of Oregon, [KnowYourForest.org](#)
- Pre-COVID, in 2018-19, OFRI offered or supported 66 landowner training sessions, reaching more than 6,300 participants

- Since 2002, OFRI has offered a unique publication, the 222-page [Oregon Forest Protection Laws – An Illustrated Manual](#). OFRI updates the manual as laws change, most recently in 2018
- OFRI provides publications designed for non-professional foresters, on topics such as wildlife protection and fire risk reduction
- OFRI collaborated with OSU Extension to convert its popular [Tree School](#) to an online format, creating even greater access to a valued education resource.

INNOVATION KEEPS SECTOR VITAL. In 2015, OFRI received a \$250,000 grant from the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Wood Innovation Program to educate architects, engineers, builders and the general public about the benefits of building with cross-laminated timber. CLT and other advanced wood products make it possible to construct multi-story structures made with wood – a sustainable and climate-friendly material – with less environmental impact than traditional building methods. OFRI spearheaded the education effort, in Oregon and nationally, earning Portland distinction as “the center of intellectual capital for mass timber.” OFRI’s video, [Forest to Frame](#), has been viewed on YouTube more than 10,000 times.

THE LEGISLATURE CREATED OFRI IN 1991 in partnership with the forest industry. OFRI’s legislation is modeled after statutes that govern Oregon’s 22 grower-supported agricultural and commercial fisheries commodity commissions. All these commissions are funded by an assessment on production. OFRI is funded by an assessment on harvested timber. All forest landowners who harvest more than 25,000 board feet of timber a year pay this assessment into the Oregon Forest Resources Institute Fund, one that is a separate and distinct fund from the state’s General Fund. Over its 30-years, OFRI has neither requested nor received any monies from the General Fund.

When creating OFRI, the Legislature acknowledged that the forest sector is one of the largest in the state, providing monetary returns to employees, forestland owners, mill owners and operators, public timber purchasers, timber harvesters, investors and others. The state’s welfare, the Legislature found, relies on the health and vigor of the forest sector. Unlike other commissions, OFRI does not market or advertise specific forest products. OFRI’s education mission supports the sector’s economic importance and the wise use of natural resources for the benefit of all Oregonians.

ECONOMIC IMPORTANCE. The [2019 Forest Report](#), prepared by economic researchers at the University of Idaho and Oregon State University, states that:

- In 2016, the forest sector generated more than \$18 billion in output, 71,000 total jobs and \$8 billion in gross domestic product, or 4.7 percent of total state output
- The total amount of public and private forestland, about 48 percent of the land base in Oregon, has held steady for more than 60 years at 30 million acres
- In the three most recent years for which data is available (2015-2017), Oregon timber harvest remained steady at around 3.8 billion board feet per year
- Oregon is the top state for softwood lumber and plywood production

CHANGES IN OREGON. In 1991, the state’s population was 2.9 million. Today, Oregon’s population totals 4.2 million, the result of births and longer life expectancy to be sure, but also in-migration. With the transition from a more rural to urban population, many citizens today have little first-hand knowledge of forest management or the efforts of the state to protect non-timber resources.

Another change in the past three decades is Oregon's forest protection laws. Oregon is a progressive leader with respect to laws that protect the environment. Forestry laws date back to the 1940s. The state's signature Forest Practices Act was passed in the 1970s, along with the Bottle Bill, Beach Bill and Land Use Planning and Conservation Act. The Forest Protection Act contains nearly 300 enforceable rules that apply to state and private land. It's been updated more than 30 times in response to new science. Oregon's land-use laws have done an outstanding job of protecting farm and forestland from development, along with private landowner voluntary actions to conserve streams and habitat.

OFRI IS GOVERNED BY VOLUNTEERS, as are all the commodity commissions. Board members represent timber producers, small woodland owners and industry employees. *Ex officio* members include a public representative appointed by the Legislature and the dean of the Oregon State University College of Forestry. An Oregon Department of Forestry liaison assists the board. All board and committee meetings are open to the public. The agency's proposed budget is reviewed by the State Forester and is available for public review prior to adoption. In each of the past 16 years (2003-2019), OFRI received the state controller's "Gold Star" award for timely and accurate financial reporting.

There have only been three executive directors in OFRI's 30-year history. I say with all candidness that each of us took and continue to take our public service roles and responsibilities very seriously.

OFRI is barred from using funds "for the purpose of influencing, or attempting to influence, any legislation or any rulemaking or other administrative activity of any state board, commission or agency" (ORS 526.650). The record will show that during my 10 years at OFRI, I and my staff respected that statute. Trips to the Capitol were rare and only by invitation. No letters in support of pending legislation or rules were submitted by either myself or my staff.

As specified by statute, all of OFRI's publications, website material, videos, etc., are factually based and extensively reviewed by board members and partner organizations, including the Oregon Department of Forestry, Oregon State University, Oregon State University Extension, and many private entities.

THE NEED FOR EDUCATION about Oregon's forests, sustainable forest management and forest products is as great as ever. OFRI is regarded by its key audiences as a credible clearinghouse of information about Oregon's forests – public and private, large and small. OFRI has demonstrated its ability to economically deliver accessible content using innovative communication and education methods.

Now is not the time to change a model that is serving the best interests of the public, landowners, the state and its forests.

Sincerely,

Paul F. Barnum

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