



TO: House Committee on Agriculture and Natural Resources

FROM: Quinn Read, Center for Biological Diversity & Sristi Kamal, Defenders of Wildlife

DATE: March 1, 2021

RE: Testimony in Support of HB 2357 – Eliminating the Oregon Forest Resources Institute and the Oregon Forest Resources Institute Fund

On behalf of the Center for Biological Diversity and Defenders of Wildlife, we respectfully submit the following comments in support of HB 2357, which eliminates the Oregon Forest Resources Institute (OFRI or Institute) and the Oregon Forest Resources Institute Fund. The Center works to secure a future for all species, great and small, hovering on the brink of extinction. Defenders of Wildlife is dedicated to the protection of native and imperiled species in their natural communities. We strongly believe that OFRI should be eliminated and that those funds should be redirected to ensure that the Oregon Department of Forestry can fully implement its conservation mission.

OFRI was created by the Oregon Legislature in 1991 with the goal of supporting education and outreach on forestry practices and sustainable forest management in the state. However, for over three decades, OFRI has neglected its mandate and instead used tax dollars to promote the interests of the logging industry. OFRI has conducted illegal lobbying activities, actively worked to undermine science, and has produced costly and misleading advertising -- all to benefit the timber industry. The Institute's illegal and unethical behavior was brought to light in an [investigative report by OPB, The Oregonian, and ProPublica](#).

These revelations do not indicate an institution merely in need of reform. They indicate an institution that is fundamentally and irretrievably broken. HB 2357 takes the necessary step of eliminating OFRI and imagining a path forward that protects our natural resources for current and future generations of Oregonians. However, we are concerned that the language about the creation of a Sound Forestry Practices Subaccount does not provide sufficient direction about how funds will be spent. We strongly encourage Section 1 to be amended to ensure compliance with the best available science as follows:

SECTION 1. (1) In collaboration with other state agencies, the State Forestry Department shall develop and apply sound forestry practices **in accordance with the best available science** to:

Additionally, we would be better served by redirecting funding from OFRI toward measures that will enrich our natural resources and promote climate resiliency. Examples include, but are not limited to, redirecting funds to Oregon Department of Forestry or Oregon State University to promote:

- Forest restoration projects on state forest lands
- Restoration of riparian habitats that would improve water quality and protect habitat for imperiled species including salmon and steelheads
- Restoring habitat connectivity, including removing roads and barriers to fish passage
- Setting up a grant program that would promote research and mitigation of climate change impacts on our forest ecosystems
- Setting up a grant program that would promote education and implementation of sustainable forestry practices among small woodland owners, especially in light of climate change impacts
- Establishing and supporting a collaborative body/committee between ODF and OSU and other stakeholders to advise both agencies on forest management, wildfire and climate change adaptation and mitigation

As an institute that is meant to promote the best available science in forestry management, it is particularly egregious that OFRI has worked so hard to undermine science and mislead Oregonians to serve the timber industry. Recent research on forest climate issues conducted by Oregon State University's faculty -- research which was academically peer reviewed and published in a highly reputed academic journal -- was intentionally and wrongfully deemed flawed by OFRI and its executives. Undermining science to mislead decision makers and the public is a dangerous path -- one that must not be allowed to become a precedent in our state.

The scope and scale of misinformation spread by OFRI extends also to our logging laws. Oregon has the weakest logging laws, the weakest logging tax system and the highest level of forest deforestation and degradation along the West Coast. Oregon has lost millions of dollars in federal grants explicitly because of our weak logging laws and yet OFRI continued to mislead Oregonians, falsely advertising about our logging roles and underplaying the role they have played in degrading the quality of our land and waters.

OFRI has failed its mission and in the process has cost the state and its people millions of dollars by promoting unsustainable logging practices and robbing Oregonians of the ecosystem services that our forests provide. HB 2357 is timely and necessary to ensure a sustainable future for our natural resources and our small, local woodland owners. We strongly urge you to support HB 2357 to eliminate OFRI. We also urge you to adopt more specific language about how funds should be redirected.

Thank you for your time and consideration of these issues. Please feel free to contact us with any questions or concerns. You can reach Quinn Read at qread@biologicaldiversity.org and Sristi Kamal at skamal@defenders.org.