

Submitted by Ronna Frank March 2, 2021

I am writing to ask you to hold the Oregon Forest Resources Institute (OFRI) accountable for all their misleading advertising and illegal lobbying. Pass HB 2357 to eliminate OFRI.

Over a period of many years, the Oregon Forest Resources Institute has a documented history of misrepresenting and thwarting scientific information about the dangers of environmental issues caused by logging in forests. Three of those issues include: (1) Carbon Footprint (2) Pesticide Spraying (3) Water Quality. OFRI has also used tax dollars for a purpose they are restricted, by law, from using — to influence or attempting to influence policy.

Here are three publically reported examples I have found to support my testimony:

(1) Carbon Footprint

In 2018, while Gov. Kate Brown was writing a bill to enact extensive limits on greenhouse gas emissions, leaders of OFRI were working behind the scenes to discredit research they feared would convince her to target the forest industry.

That research at the Oregon State University was published in March 2018, and for the first time showed how much carbon was lost to the atmosphere as a result of cutting trees in Oregon. It concluded that logging, once thought to have no negative effect on global warming, was among the state's biggest climate polluters.

The researchers at OSU, led by forest ecologist Beverly Law, found that the state could dramatically shrink its carbon footprint if trees on private land were cut less frequently.

Those findings alarmed forest industry leaders in Oregon, who then put together groups of scientists and lobbyists to challenge the study and its authors. The Oregon Forest Resources Institute was among the groups leading the fight, funded with tax dollars, but, by law, restricted from influencing or attempting to influence policy.

(2) Pesticide Spraying

In 2017, a professor in Oregon State's forestry school, Mark Needham, was planning a survey to determine public perceptions of herbicide spraying in private forests. Timber companies were applying herbicides from helicopters to kill the vegetation that grows in the bare earth of clear-cuts, because that competes with newly planted tree seedlings for water and sunlight.

Needham's survey included questions about whether residents trusted private timber companies to provide truthful information about the issue and whether they would vote for or against aerial spraying if asked at the ballot. The timber industry's internal research had shown Oregonians were worried about that practice due to the state's forests logging more frequently.

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Paul Barnum, who retired as executive director of OFRI in 2018 but continued working under contract through June, wrote in an email on July 19, 2017, "The research project sounds legit, but also fairly dangerous. We already know what the public perception about chemical use is, so to have something in the public domain, especially from the College of Forestry, that confirms it, would not be a good thing in my estimation."

The survey was distributed in April 2019 to more than 5,000 Oregon households. Two months later, after a timber company alerted the institute about the survey progress, Erin Isselmann, the Institute's executive director since July 2018, emailed the forestry school's dean, Anthony Davis, challenging the validity of the questions. Public employees at the institute also coordinated a demonstration of aerial pesticide spraying and invited elected officials, singling out a lawmaker who'd tried to tighten spraying rules.

(3) Water Quality

In 2013, the residents in Rockaway Beach, a tiny coastal town, received alerts about cancer-causing contamination in their drinking water after timber companies logged most of the hills around the creek that supplies the town.

That year Oregon state health officials released a study about communities around Triangle Lake in Oregon's Coast Range, which was a leading timber-producing region. The study found low levels of toxic herbicides in the drinking water, air and in residents' urine. The state said it was possible timber spraying was the source. The residents in the area called for statewide restrictions on spraying within 2 miles of schools and homes, but then-Gov. John Kitzhaber did not grant that.

For years, the institute has helped timber executives who worried about the threat that new drinking water protections would pose to their ability to log. The message that Oregon's forests produced clean water was a central theme. This included a commercial showing a father and son standing beside a creek pouring a glass of crystal clear water. The father said, "This is Oregon water. Oregon has strong laws that help protect our watersheds. And, besides it's the right thing to do. The son said, "You've got to have clean water."

The institute's advertising campaign is its largest expenditure of \$1 million annually. But the commercials don't acknowledge major problems caused by industrial logging. And the federal government withholds more than \$1 million from Oregon each year because its laws don't do enough to protect coastal rivers from logging pollution. Oregon's logging laws have been faulted by Federal regulators for pushing the now near extinction of coastal salmon.