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To: Oregon policymakers

From: Conservation representatives

Re: Support for an Elliott State Research Forest (SB 1546 -1 Amendments)

January 21, 2022

We represent conservation organizations and individuals that have fought for nearly two decades to protect the Elliott State Forest, a natural treasure in Oregon's Coast Range. Among our signatories are groups that have worked successfully to secure conservation of the Elliott both in court (including lawsuits to prevent the sale of the Elliott to private timber interests) and collaboratively on the state's Elliott State Research Forest Stakeholder Advisory Group over the past three years. We have a long track record of working to achieve a strong conservation outcome for the Elliott Forest and will continue to do so.

**Senate Bill 1546 (-1 Amendments) is being advanced during the 2022 Oregon legislative session to create the Elliott State Research Forest and fully fund decoupling to sever the archaic tie that subjects the Elliott to funding Oregon's K-12 schools with timber receipts from logging the forest. We support the legislation and funding proposal, and encourage you to as well,** as it would accomplish the following based upon agreements made over the past three years:

1. Retain the Forest in public ownership.
2. Create a new Elliott State Research Forest Authority as an agency within the State overseen by an independent stakeholder advisory board appointed by the State Land Board (Governor, Secretary of State and Treasurer) and subject to relevant state public record (transparency and accountability) laws.
3. Appoint Oregon State University to lead the research-driven management of the Forest on behalf of the public and with a commitment to public access and use.
4. Advance collaborative partnerships, including notably with relevant Oregon Tribes and incorporation of traditional ecological knowledge.
5. Vest oversight authority in the State Land Board, including approval of and/or changes to Elliott State Research Forest foundational management documents and/or response to emergency situations.
6. Provide at least \$121 million to complete the decoupling of the Elliott from the Common School Fund.

Significant conservation commitments are already built into the Elliott State Research Forest concept through the Advisory Committee process and State Land Board votes, including:

- Creation of a contiguous 34,000+-acre, permanent reserve on the west side of the Elliott State Forest, and smaller reserves across the rest of the Forest. Within the reserves, previously logged stands will be restored to again become older forest, thereby increasing the amount of mature and old-growth forest over time.
- Protection of over 90% of the remaining mature and old-growth forests on the Elliott, including all trees that survived the 1868 Coos Bay fire (153 years old in 2022), and protection of all known spotted owl activity centers on the Forest.
- Approval of a Habitat Conservation Plan for endangered species by the US Fish and Wildlife Service and NOAA Fisheries (anticipated in 2023).
- Approval of a Forest Management Plan that further specifies agreed upon species, watershed, scenic and other protection measures (anticipated in 2023).
- Improved streamside protections for salmon and other species.
- Sideboards minimizing the aerial application of herbicides, which may be used only as a last resort.
- A plan which will ensure that the Elliott increases in both age and complexity over time.

After nearly three years of work, the Elliott State Research Forest stakeholder process has achieved something remarkable. It has achieved consensus among diverse stakeholders including conservation, timber, recreation and education interests, Tribes, and counties on one of Oregon's most conflicted and contested landscapes. To reach a negotiated Elliott State Research Forest agreement, there have been compromises made, including allowing commercial logging in some of the Forest's previously managed tree farms and thinning within a limited amount of mature forest. This has been done to address the research framework established by Oregon State University and to find common ground with other interests on the Advisory Committee. Passage of Senate Bill 1546 (-1 Amendments) presents the potential to transcend historic conflicts and launch the Elliott into a new era of collaboration and conservation.

It has become increasingly evident that a lasting policy solution for the Elliott must be found that keeps this outstanding temperate rainforest in public ownership, embraces the forest's carbon storage value to mitigate climate change, protects its mature and old-growth forest habitat for threatened wildlife, safeguards its waterways that harbor imperiled salmonids, meaningfully incorporates Tribal input, and delinks the Forest from the Common School Fund.

We believe that the Elliott State Research Forest agreement achieves these outcomes and offers a new way forward for forest management in western Oregon.

**We strongly urge you to sign on and support, without modification, passage of the Elliott Legislation (Senate Bill 1546 -1 Amendments) and the accompanying funding proposal to complete decoupling of the Elliott from the Common School Fund.**

Please do not hesitate to contact us with any thoughts or questions.

Sincerely yours,

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