

February 3, 2022

Chair Golden and members of the committee,

Thank you for allowing me the time to speak today. My name is Keith Tymchuk and I am an educator in Reedsport, OR as well as a member of the Elliott State Research Forest Advisory Committee.

We are all aware that the Elliott has for decades been at the center of a debate, one pitting the forest's historical role of helping fund our public schools through timber harvest with the forest's providing of important benefits beyond harvest revenue.

That debate, sometimes so raucous it was more of a collision, has led us to a place of complete stalemate...one so complete there haven't been healthy contributions to the Common School from the Elliott since 2012. Surely that can't be the highest and best use of 90,000+ acres of public forest, among the best tree growing environments in the land, and one statutorily dedicated to funding our schools as well as supporting our communities but one where we must also preserving species and habitat.

Truthfully, before this process started I supported the sale of the Elliott. It was a solution that I thought made sense. But what we've done here is something uniquely Oregon, something better. An Elliott State Research Forest tastes of Oregon. And in a hyper-charged environment we're all doing something now that Oregon has often done well in the past, we're meeting in the middle. I completely support the creation of the Elliott State Research Forest. There IS a way to keep the Elliott in public ownership, protect critical habitat, allow for world-class forestry research, significantly increase the meager harvest that has been coming off the Elliott for decades, allow for continued public access, fund the common school fund and reduce the litigation that keeps the Elliott tied up in knots.

I think that we've found it. We've found that way.

I am intimately tied to the Elliott. I've been hunting blacktail deer and Roosevelt Elk there for more than 40 years. There are few places in the Elliott that I haven't been over that time. It is special to me. And I'm not alone in that regard. For generations, folks in my part of Oregon have cherished the Elliott for the wide range of value that it brings: recreational, environmental and economic. I think SB 1546 preserves those values.

I had a unique role in the advisory committee in that I was the only "At Large" member. I've been an educator in south coast public schools for 41 years. I was elected 6 times as mayor of Reedsport. I've served on the Port Commission for the Port of Umpqua. I come from and know the south coast. But my interest here is in Oregon as a whole. In fact, I think that every member of the committee eventually came to believe that any solution we would find must be good for Oregon as a whole and that meant that we all had to give up a little.

So our goal in coming together for three years was always to keep the Elliott working for everyone, all of Oregon, for the next 100 years and beyond. By creating the Elliott State Research Forest and the independent Elliott State Research Authority which will run it, I believe that you can do just that.

There were lengthy discussions among Advisory Committee members regarding how best to configure a Board of Directors so that spirit and intention of our work and SB 1546-1 will be implemented over time. Ultimately, we felt that carving out specific seats on the board for designated interests has promoted conflict and politicized appointments in other natural resource boards. We decided rather, that key criteria and a process for the University, and sitting board members to develop a slate of candidates for the Land Board to select from would be more in the spirit of what we are working to accomplish on the Elliott going forward. In every conversation we had, diverse representation on the Board was always regarded as a good. We believe the Bill as written will result in a diverse board with the expertise necessary to operate the forest collaboratively into the future.

The advisory committee, of which I was a part, sent to each member of the legislature a letter urging your support of SB 1546-1. It was a unanimous statement support, one that didn't come easy, but one that speaks to the quality of work we believe we have all done. I urge you to support SB 1546-1.