

Friday, February 4, 2022

To Mr. Jeff Golden, Chairman of the Committee on Natural Resources and Wildlife Recovery
Honorable Members of the Committee on Natural Resources and Wildlife Recovery
Honorable Members of the Oregon Senate

Brief: Let us be careful, and let us be wise. We're out of forests, and we're out of time. Our common cause is the Elliott; our fate, inextricable from that of this great Forest.

I write today in great haste to express my strong opposition to Oregon Senate Bill 1546 and to urge the members of the Committee to study with exceedingly great care the matter of our last great Coastal Rainforest, a green and resplendent refuge in the midst of damaged life, poisoned waters, ruined and polluted worlds. With something like twenty years remaining to turn things around, we can no longer consider the Elliott a "resource" capable of perpetual renewal. Once destroyed, the Forest cannot be recreated by us under any conditions. It is time to move beyond such arrogance.

After working on the matter of the Elliott for around three years now— researching, attending meetings religiously, following every movement, consulting with experts of many sorts, I think it is fair to say that SB 1546 is a misconceived and misguided attempt to solve what many describe as a "longstanding issue," and herein precisely lies the problem. In actuality, we have been given a great opportunity to lead the world in thinking about Forests, what is left of them; to show how we might develop new, relevant, contemporary models that enable the perpetuity of the Earth and all its creatures; and, instead, we have treated this opportunity, this gift, as simply a demonstration of mere sociology: the need simply to agree. The price of this false consensus is the Forest itself; and since our fate is tied inextricably to what remains of the Elliott State Forest and Forests like it, the price is our very lives, our health and wellbeing, and those of our children. SB 1546 is a mistake, indeed, a disaster: It will rename, fragment, and effectively eviscerate the Elliott State Forest, a massive tract of coastal rainforest, home to the Northern Spotted Owl and the old-growth loving Marbled Murrelet, among many others, and the origination point of almost a quarter of all wild Oregon Coast Coho Salmon (source: Oregon Wild). By treating such a gift as a "problem," the proposal lacks both critical and creative thinking; it lacks humility for a world that, again, has simply been given to us.

The Elliott State Forest is public land, and, as such, it belongs to all Oregonians, and it belongs to them in perpetuity. It belongs neither to a committee representing the College of Forestry of Oregon State University, with its antiquated, irrelevant, and damaging notions of forestry nor, indeed, to any

part of it, nor does this land belong to the Governor of the State nor to the three-member State Land Board, nor does it belong to the Department of State Land nor to the timber industry and special interests. The Elliott belongs to all Oregonians, and the vast majority of Oregonians stand firmly against its damage and destruction by chainsaws and drip torches, herbicides and poisons. More specifically, the Elliott belongs to the schoolchildren and youth of Oregon, for whom the Forest was established, and it is they who might best be consulted about its future, given that few of them, unlike their elders, seem oblivious to the environmental catastrophes awaiting them. Given the emphasis on industry and special interests we witnessed at yesterday's meeting, one feels obliged to point out to the Committee on Natural Resources and Wildlife Recovery that the monies that might be generated by the Elliott for the Common School Fund are clearly worth far more than \$121 million. In terms of monetization, we urge the Committee to explore more creative and less damaging, nay destructive, possibilities than logging for, and on the behalf of, the children of Oregon. These possibilities might include carbon sequestration, recreation fees, and outdoor classrooms for schoolchildren across the state.

But I fear this kind of talk misses the point, a point we have already surpassed. The Elliott, containing as it does stands of old-growth forest, is, quite literally, our last coastal rainforest—an island surrounded by vast acres of clear-cut trees and trees meant for clear-cutting. In truth, there is almost nothing left of the great, once pristine rainforests of the Pacific Northwest, their sad remnants having been contaminated by the almost-constant aerial spraying of herbicides. The Elliott might be described as the lungs of our great State, the last reminder of what coastal Oregon used to look like, indeed, what it used to be: a Paradise, a pure and unsullied stretch of God's green earth, a home for animals and humans alike. (Make no mistake: Our fate is one.) Given our increasingly dire climatological future, we should perhaps say that the Elliott, in actuality, belongs to no one. It is a sovereign entity and should remain as such, for only in this way can we possibly survive the great upheavals headed our way. Our last hope is that the Earth if left alone, left undisturbed, undamaged, unpoisoned, and unviolated, might heal itself. To reach this point, we will need leaders willing to read, willing to do research, willing to spend the necessary time to understand and recognize what is happening to our world and how we might save what is left of it. We need new and different models for how to do that. We need research rather than special interests and petty territorializations. We can no longer afford politics as usual, and we cannot afford bias, and this is why all organizations involved in the fate of the Elliott, including environmental organizations, must state clearly and unequivocally whether they have received any monies from the timber industry and how much. Members of the Committee on Natural Resources and Wildlife Recovery and, indeed, all Members of the Oregon Senate must state whether they have received monies from the timber industry. If the answer is in the affirmative, they must recuse themselves from any votes or decisions pertaining to the fate of the Elliott State Forest, the fundamental

principle of Conflict of Interest being well known to all persons of integrity. OSU's College of Forestry, needless to add, should have no voting rights nor, indeed, any influence with regards to determining the fate of the Elliott, numerous positions at the College, including that of its Dean, being funded by the timber industry to the tune of millions of dollars. In addition, the College has a long history of mismanagement, indeed, what sometimes seems to be an utter disregard for forests, for trees, and for the animals that live in them: indeed, the Forest is a world that seems increasingly incomprehensible to them as such. The time has come for Oregon to free itself from the undue influence of the timber industry. To refuse to do so will mean our demise. Again, let us state the obvious: The Elliott is the last large tract of Oregon Coast Rainforest left standing. Please let it remain as such despite intimidation, undue influence, and clear bias on behalf of those who desire to log it.

Despite massive outcry against the multi-year process during which Oregon State University sought literal ownership of the Forest, and despite the fact that the vast majority of the inhabitants of the State of Oregon have no idea that their public land is about to be turned over to an "authority," the bill is now moving with an almost eerie alacrity through the current legislative session in Salem, Oregon—a session that, notably, will last a mere 35 days. Why such speed, many find themselves asking. Yesterday's meeting on Senate Bill 1546 (Thursday, February 3, 2022, 1:00 p.m.) was a case-in-point of what can only be called "stacking." Once again, we heard the conclusions of the official Members of the Elliott State Forest Advisory Committee, who had been handpicked in order to reach a conclusion that can only be described as "foregone," with details to be ironed out at the local bar over mugs of beer. Only after they had finished their presentation, content with having found "middle ground" with former antagonists on the "longstanding issue" of the Elliott were members of the public given a couple of minutes apiece. I found myself cut off towards the end of my testimony despite the fact that I did not hear a bell or any other signal—and am still puzzled as to exactly what transpired. (The Senate might consider switching to Zoom, a superior system of communication.) Let us again state the obvious: Allowing the official members of a handpicked committee to take up the space allotted to the greater public seems inappropriate. But here is my greater fear: Members of the Oregon Senate are simply unaware of what most Oregonians think and feel about the planet, about the natural world, about our forests, their animals, about our children, about the clear and present dangers facing us.

To conclude this brief and hurried missive: Senate Bill 1546 will decimate the Elliott as a living entity, first renaming it the "Elliott State Research Forest," then transforming it into a research station and "laboratory," and eventually, and, indeed, soon enough, clearing roads through the forest, opening it up once again to significant logging and even allowing for "exchange of lands" ostensibly for properties outside of it (SECTION 2, SB 1546). It doesn't take much to imagine the abuses to come.

Our common fate depends on this great Forest and others like it across the world—what remains of our world. Again, we urge you to vote no on a bill that compromises all of us. We urge you to do the right thing. Indeed, all of us are counting on it.

Respectfully yours,

**Anne-Marie Oliver
Founding Co-Director
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About the Oregon Institute for Creative Research: E4

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