



HB 3019: Improvements for Oregon Forest Resources Institute in the Harvest Tax

House Committee On Agriculture, Land Use, Natural Resources, and Water – Josie Koehne – 2.7.2023

[HB 3019](#) changes the provisions of Forest Products Harvest Tax for the structure and funding the Oregon Forest Resources Institute (OFRI) in response to findings by the Oregon Secretary of State's [July 2021 audit of OFRI](#).

The audit found that OFRI did live up to its primary statutory purpose: ***“Under statute, OFRI “shall enhance and provide support for Oregon’s forest products industry. The agency may also increase public understanding of forestry practices and the benefits of forest products, support education and cooperative efforts among landowners and industry, conduct research and facilitate improvements in wood utilization and products manufacturing, and publish materials relating to these functions.*”**

“To achieve their program goals, OFRI staff coordinate with academic, governmental, and industry stakeholders” and “prioritizes outreach to the general public, with over 50% of agency funding going to support these public education initiatives, including annual advertising campaigns.”

OFRI produces wealth of valuable, well-produced educational programs and materials for K-12, as well as for the general public and for landowner education. I have seen many of these useful materials with forestry data, maps and information about the Forest Practices Act regulations.

However, the audit found that ***“OFRI presents itself as objective, but at times oversimplifies complex forestry topics to the point of being misleading. The agency lacks quality standards and a documented and robust internal review process to ensure the production of complete and accurate public information.”***

Incorporated into this bill are the audit’s core recommendations of:

- 1) Providing greater specificity and direction around the agency’s purpose, authority, and objectives.
- 2) Increasing non-industry voting representation on OFRI’s governing board to ensure a balance of public views.
- 3) Instituting an oversight function to ensure that quality information (objective, accurate, reliable) is being developed and shared by the agency.
- 4) Clarifying the statute’s prohibitions on influencing or attempting to influence legislation, and provisions.

The bill also has the Board of Forestry oversee communications for bias and accuracy and, set the annual tax rate to fund OFRI, rather than OFRI setting its own tax rate and managing its own fund. The revenue generated is deposited into the State Forestry Department Fund to be allocated in thirds to the OFRI Fund, the Land Protection Fund (for wildfires suppression) and for a new Environmental Literacy Plan administered by the OSU Extension Service. ***We believe that OFRI should be funded adequately to continue its core educational mission.***

We applaud the bill sponsors for following through on the SOS audit team’s recommendations. We think SB 3019 will restore public trust in OFRI’s publications and communications and reduce its influence on legislative policy decisions.

We read the bills and follow the money