



February 7, 2023

Representative Ken Helm, Chair
House Committee on Agriculture, Land Use, Water and Resources
900 Court Street NE
Salem, OR 97301

Subject: Support for HB 3019

Dear Chair Helm and Members of the Committee:

My name is Sean Stevens and I am the executive director of Oregon Wild. We work across the state to protect wildlands, wildlife, and waters – and we were a key author of the Private Forest Accord, a landmark agreement that is overhauling Oregon’s private forest laws and setting a new trajectory for the state.

We strongly support HB 3019 as another step in modernizing the state’s approach to forests and how we perceive them. We urge the committee to move this bill on to the Revenue Committee.

HB 3019 represents a compromise based on extensive legislative hearings in the 2021 session. After investigative reports from the Oregonian, OPB, and ProPublica broke in the summer of 2020, legislators crafted HB 2357 to eliminate the Oregon Forest Resources Institute (OFRI). OFRI had broken the public’s trust by working behind the scenes to suppress scientific research; lobby for the forest industry in direct contravention of their authorizing statute; and misleading the Oregon public with decades of pro-logging ads that claimed we had strong forest laws when we did not.

After hearing in committee in 2021 some of the benefits that OFRI provided to the state, the authors of HB 2357 came back with an amendment to enact key reforms at OFRI – including the elimination of the general public advertising – while right-sizing their budget for their new activities. The amendment was subsequently approved by the Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee and then the Revenue Committee. Ultimately, HB 2357A passed the full House only to run out of time in the Senate.

HB 3019 is a nearly identical bill to the compromise OFRI legislation that passed in 2021 and Oregon Wild urges you all to finish the job and pass HB 3019 this year.

The case for OFRI reform has grown stronger since 2021.

The passage of the Private Forest Accord and its funding of a comprehensive Small Forestland Owner Assistance Office within the Department of Forestry has made OFRI's work to support the small forestland owner community redundant. This new office at ODF is already staffing up with new field foresters and administrative support staff to aide small forestland owners in accessing grant programs, understanding the new PFA rules, and ensuring that those rules are being followed. Under HB 3019, OFRI will still have the ability to support the small forestland owning community alongside ODF but they will not need the same expansive resources as they do now.

The advent of the PFA is also showing that OFRI's inflated public advertising budget is inappropriate for the time. It's just a little ironic that OFRI is now spending hundreds of thousands of tax dollars promoting the new Private Forest Accord logging laws when – for three decades – they spent millions misleading Oregonians into thinking that our laws were strong and did not need modernization. It is important to note that decreasing OFRI's advertising budget does not mean that they won't be able to continue forestry education through reports, partnerships, and trainings.

Throughout the years, OFRI's advertising budget has comprised approximately half of their operating budget. We simply do not need the state to pay \$2 million per year to run TV ads telling the public that we replant after clearcutting.

OFRI has a new executive director and has been reporting back to the Secretary of State on implementing some of the recommended changes from the SoS audit of OFRI that was completed in July 2021. But, there are recommendations in that audit that can only happen through statute. These are the key accountability pieces in HB 3019 that make sure OFRI doesn't slip back into some of its troublesome past practices.

Reforming OFRI to be right-sized, more accountable, and have more diverse representation on its board is the next step in our evolving approach to forest management, forest protection, and how we talk about forest and forestry in the state. We urge you to support HB 3019.

Thank you,



Sean Stevens
Executive Director
Oregon Wild

Attachment A: HB 3019 fact sheet



Support House Bill 3019

Leverage Funding for Critical Firefighting and Environmental Education by Reforming Outdated Oregon Forest Resources Institute (OFRI)

HB 3019 redirects public dollars from the outdated Oregon Forest Resources Institute (OFRI) to support critical firefighting efforts and chronically underfunded environmental education. This bill is a much-needed response to the public outcry and investigative reporting that led the Oregon House of Representatives to pass HB 2357A in 2021. Although the bill never received a vote in the Senate, HB 3019 picks up where the Legislature left off to implement critical reforms and prioritize urgent funding needs.



Why reform of OFRI is needed in 2023

Investigative reporting in the summer of 2020 from [OPB/Oregonian/ProPublica](#) and a subsequent [Secretary of State audit](#) released in July 2021 laid bare the multiple ways that OFRI used tax dollars to undermine scientific research, defied statutory prohibitions by lobbying against forest reform efforts, and misled Oregonians about the effectiveness of forest laws in protecting critical resources like clean water and wildlife habitat.

Further, with passage of the bipartisan Private Forest Accord legislation and new regulations, OFRI's role in support of small forestland owners has largely been made redundant by significant funding for the new Small Forestland Owner Assistance Office at the Oregon Department of Forestry.

Passing HB 3019 continues to move Oregon's forest practices into the 21st century by redirecting public dollars to where they are most needed, and shifting away from outdated programs that are no longer effective.

What Does HB 3019 Do? Where Will the Funds Go?

1. The bill directs one third of the harvest tax that currently goes to OFRI to the Oregon Forest Land Protection Fund to support the Oregon Department of Forestry's firefighting efforts.
2. The bill also directs one third of the harvest tax that goes to OFRI to be dedicated to implementing the [Oregon Environmental Literacy Plan](#). This plan was created by a task force in 2013 after the Legislature passed the No Oregon Child Left Inside bill (HB 2544) to ensure environmental education fostered the ability for future generations to make sound decisions about our natural resources, climate, and environment. The Plan was never funded and Oregon students and teachers lack critical support for enhancing environmental literacy in the K-12 setting.
3. Finally, the bill reforms OFRI by prohibiting "generalized advertising for public education" and adding a conservation representative and a fish and wildlife expert to the OFRI board.

Now is the time for change

Passage of the bipartisan Private Forest Accord in 2022 (SB 1501) was the first comprehensive reform of the Oregon Forest Practices Act in decades. As the new rules are implemented in 2023 and 2024, now is the time to modernize OFRI. The Secretary of State audited OFRI to protect the public interest and improve state government. The audit findings demonstrate that there are a number of serious concerns with OFRI's approach.

"OFRI is a state agency with limited independent oversight, broad authority, and ongoing confusion about its role as a public entity." – Oregon Secretary of State Audit, 2021¹

- **Oregon law (ORS 526.650) clearly prohibits OFRI from lobbying.** Yet, OFRI has worked in recent years to lobby against climate change legislation that might impact the logging industry. In addition, they have lobbied against potential regulation at the Board of Forestry to better protect clean water in forested streams.
- **OFRI's advertising misleads Oregonians.** As an arm of the logging industry, OFRI spends tax dollars to provide biased information to Oregonians about our logging laws. By excluding forest conservation or environmental affiliation from its board, OFRI undermines its credibility to provide objective information.

"OFRI's statute does not align with good governance standards and diminishes the agency's ability to serve the public interest." - Oregon Secretary of State Audit, 2021²

Support HB 3019 and Prioritize Public Dollars for Firefighting and Environmental Education that Address Current Needs for Oregonians

For more information, please contact Julia DeGraw (julia@olcv.org | 503-347-3599) or Sean Stevens (ss@oregonwild.org | 503.490.7135)

¹ Oregon Forest Resources Institute: OFRI's Statute Undermines its Public Benefit and the State Agency is Not Transparent About its Statutory Mandate to Support the Industry, Secretary of State Oregon Audits Division, July 2021, p. 12.

² Secretary of State Audit, p. 18.