



February 7, 2023

Chair Helm and members of the House Agriculture, Land Use, Natural Resource and Water Committee. My name is Roger Beyer, and I am the lobbyist for Oregon Small Woodlands Association (OSWA). OSWA opposes HB 3019.

OFRI was set up legislatively in 1991 with guidelines to educate the public and forest owners about forest practices. Funding for OFRI comes directly from forest owners who harvest timber through the Forest Products Harvest tax.

As explained by Jim Paul, OFRI's Executive Director, OFRI has a great partnership with Oregon's educational system and teachers. Annually, OFRI funds, K-12 in classroom and field-forest education programs with about 700 teachers participating in OFRI's forestry education workshops reaching about 100,000 students. Last year, for the first time since 2019, 140 students in the fourth to sixth grade visited the Rediscovery Forest at the Oregon Garden Natural Resources Education Program to attend Oregon Envirothon.

More than 50% of OFRI's funding is used to provide education for the general public. OFRI's statutory purpose is to "*Increase public understanding of the practice of forestry and the use and benefits of forest products.*" Reducing their funding and ability to produce educational materials makes it virtually impossible to fulfill their statutory requirement. This is quite literally what OFRI was created to do. The materials OFRI produces, from the Oregon Forest Facts book to special reports on the economic impacts of wildfire, are invaluable to the sector and the public.

For Oregon's 79,000 family forest owners who manage 1/3 of Oregon's private forests, OFRI has positively influenced the management of Oregon's family forest owners who do not have a staff of professional foresters. For the next budget cycle, 15-20 percent of OFRI's funding is earmarked back to landowners through educational programming. With the Private Forest Accord (PFA) this landowner education will be more important than ever as all family forest owners with streams in their property will need to be educated on these new rules. OFRI provides science based and reviewed publications on every phase of forestry from growing and harvesting trees to all the public values found in Oregon's forests. This bill would change how OFRI is allowed to interact with and educate forestland owners by eliminating 67% of the funding. OSWA cannot support this change.

The educational work performed by OFRI, to all three groups, has been extremely valuable to the Oregon public to help them understand forestry and the wood products industry, one of Oregon's key industries, particularly in rural Oregon.

Oregon's land use laws mandate lands zoned as forestland must be maintained as forests with some minor options to convert to agricultural use. By statute, the purpose of Oregon's private forests is to grow and harvest trees. Just like the purpose of land zoned for agriculture needs to grow an agricultural crop. The need for a Commodity Commission for forest land is no different than the need for any other agricultural crop.

It is clear, OFRI is a Commodity Commission for Oregon's private forest owners and such, OFRI is no different than any other Commodity Commission, except that it is housed under the Department of Forestry. Like all other Commodity Commissions, the voting members on OFRI's board are producers who pay the assessment along with one member to represent the public. Adding two new voting members to the board who have no interest in the forest products industry being successful concerns us greatly. All the meetings are open to the public and the public has an opportunity to make comments when the board meets. What value to the timber industry will these new board members bring?

The changes to the OFRI board under this bill would jeopardize OFRI as a Commodity Commission. These Commissions in Oregon are for producers, governed by producers and paid for by producers. One of their primary assertions is that OFRI is funded by taxpayer dollars. In fact, OFRI is funded through the Forest Products Harvest Tax for the purpose stated in statute paid only by forest owners who harvest timber. Forest owners can opt out of this tax, if they wish, but only a few have done so.

The Secretary of State's office recently conducted a performance review of OFRI. OFRI board and staff have reviewed the audit, made the corrections, or are in the process of making the corrections they are able to. There is no reason currently to change OFRI.

It is OSWA opinion that OFRI has performed exactly how it was set up to do by providing forestry education to the public and to forest owners, as a Commodity Commission operating in a manner consistent with its statutory requirements.

OSWA requests the House Committee on Agriculture, Land Use, Natural Resource and Water not move this bill forward.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.