

My name is Catherine Thomasson, MD. Chair Helm and committee, I'm sorry I was unable to get through the link allowing me to speak at the hearing which I attended yesterday. I am submitting this testimony on behalf of the Metro Climate Action Team affiliated with Oregon League of Conservation voters and as a physician.

I am speaking in favor of HB 3019 to enact recommendations on clearing up the mandate and oversight for Oregon Forests Resource Institute (OFRI) as recommended by the State of Oregon Audit.

I want to make sure that new members understand that OFRI was given a public charge to provide education to our schoolchildren and to our citizens about our wonderful forests. They are given tax dollars to do so. Under their public mandate and as an enacted body by the legislature they are not supposed to lobby.

The Oregonian article in August of 2020 published evidence of OFRI's action (reiterated by the formal State Audit that was in direct opposition to its public charge. Like the tobacco companies, OFRI worked to suppress the science on forest carbon. They downplayed the impacts of industrial forestry on Oregon's drinking water, and they were found to engage in illegal lobbying efforts.

The new Oregon Forest Practices Act was created to help protect aquatic species, like our salmon, that have been seriously harmed by industrial, clearcut logging. Oregon up until now had been out of compliance with federal rules for several decades or more.

Despite that, OFRI touted in their materials that our streams and salmon were protected when they were not, including the video listing in the footnotes.

The most recent example of their obfuscation is the 2020 summary report [Keeping Drinking Water Safe](#), a summary of the *Trees to Tap* report from OSU.

As a physician, it is essential that we provide clean drinking water, especially to children, free from pesticides, free from silt and runoff that keeps chlorine from working and keeps filtration systems from being effective. There are many drinking watersheds that have been severely harmed by clearcutting from landslides, runoff and lack of riparian buffers. Some (including Salem) with algal blooms of cyanobacteria from use of fertilizers and other causes. Lastly there are broadcast use of pesticides to reduce unwanted species for the growth of tree plantations.

OFRI's publication, *Keeping Drinking Water Safe*, was a summary of a 300+ page report by OSU. It sounds very official, but it is slanted. It glosses over the science that clearly shows marked reduction in quality of water in forested and logged watersheds and up to 50% reduction in summer quantity of water due to tree plantation growth especially

in coastal forests. Drinking watersheds such as Corbett, Arch Cape, Rockaway Beach and many others have been harmed or shut down completely by clearcut logging with very inadequate tree borders on streams (riparian areas) and landslides. The new Oregon Forest Practices Act does not specifically address drinking water quality in spite of this issue coming up during negotiations.

The report also undermines the findings of pesticides in drinking watersheds by negating their impact. It downplays the issue by saying some pesticides don't move much in the soil (some do), some are not volatile (but some are) and that some pesticides do move quickly through the soil and are not broken down hence end up in drinking water. This is an issue that still needs to be addressed, but in the meantime, it must not be touted by OFRI as scientifically safe.

The ten owners of forestland that are producers of wood products who make up the board of OFRI are not water, biology or environmental scientists. If OFRI were only a commodity commission, it would be less of a problem as we wouldn't expect them to expound on water quality. (Although the agriculture commodity commissions all report to the Dept of Agriculture). The problem lies within the education and advertising arena that OFRI has been conducting, educating our children and landowners about the impacts to rivers and streams that run through their lands. These are waters of Oregon. This is clearly stated by the Audit. "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." (pg. 18)

HB 3019 bill takes some action to limit this impact. It adds two board members who are experts in areas other than forest logging products, one a biologist and another an environmentalist versus 10 landowners who are or potentially are producers of forest harvest products. The bill will also require all publications be evaluated before they are released to the public by the Dept of Forestry. This is common sense, and this type of oversight again occurs with agricultural commodity commissions.

It is hard to change the direction of an entity such as OFRI that violated the public's trust. I applaud their reported response to the audit. This legislation however is still needed to add additional curbs as recommended by the audit. Indeed, the auditor stated in the report that all other commodity commissions have more oversight than OFRI.

This bill clearly states that educational materials must include a conservation perspective or funds may not be expended and that OFRI must not provide generalized advertising for public education related to forest practices including the adequacy or

effectiveness of any particular forest practice. (Videos regarding this are still posted on OFRI's website).

HB 3019 is a very important bill that we urge you to pass out of committee with a due pass recommendation.

Thank you for your public hearing on this legislation.

Sincerely,

Catherine Thomasson, MD

Portland, OR

Former Executive Director of Physicians for Social Responsibility

Secretary of State; Oregon Audits Division. "OFRI's Statute Undermines its Public Benefit and the State Agency is Not Transparent About its Statutory Mandate to Support the Industry. July 2021.

<https://sos.oregon.gov/audits/Documents/2021-21.pdf> Accessed 2/6/2023.

Davis, Rob "How a public institute in Oregon became a de facto lobbying arm of the timber industry." *Oregonian, Oregon Public Broadcasting, ProPublica*, Aug. 4, 2020. <https://www.opb.org/article/2020/08/04/oregon-forest-resources-institute-osu-timber-industryinvestigation-lobbying/>

Laurie Bernstein, Lisa Arkin, Roberta Lindberg. "Oregon's Industrial Forests and Herbicide Use: A Case Study of Risk to People, Drinking Water and Salmon." *Beyond Toxics*, December 2013.

<https://sprayfreecoastcom.files.wordpress.com/2021/02/beyond-toxics-report.pdf>

Emelko, Monica; Silins, Uldis, et al. "Implications of land disturbance on drinking water treatability in a changing climate: demonstrating the need for 'source water supply and protection' strategies." *Water Res*, Jan. 2011. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/20951401/>

Oregon Forest Resources Institute. "Oregon's Forests and Water video" Feb. 22, 2012.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JoFevx1aUrY> + (Accessed Feb 1, 2023)

Oregon Forest Resources Institute. "Trees to Tap" 2020. <https://oregonforests.org/sites/default/files/2021-01/OFRI-Keeping-drinking-water-Online.pdf>

Tony Schick, Rob Davis OPB/Oregonian, "Audit finds tax funded forest institute in Oregon misled public, may have broken state law. Accessed Feb 7, 2013. <https://www.opb.org/article/2021/07/21/audit-finds-tax-funded-forest-institute-in-oregon-misled-public-may-have-broken-state-law/>