



STARKER  
FORESTS, INC.

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February 10, 2023

Chair Helm, Members of House Committee on Agriculture, Land Use, Natural Resources and Water  
Oregon State Legislature  
900 Court Street NE  
Salem, OR 97301

RE: Opposition to HB 3019

Starker Forests, a fifth-generation family-owned forestland owner in Corvallis, strongly opposes any effort to defund the Oregon Forest Resources Institute (OFRI) or make changes to its structure. We urge you to oppose HB3019.

It should be clear to the committee following the presentation by the OFRI Executive Director that OFRI operates like a commodity commission and is funded by the forest landowners who harvest timber, not the General Fund. OFRI supports the wise stewardship of natural resources for the benefit of Oregonians. It is their role to increase public understanding of forestry and its public benefits and to support education within the forestry sector. Forest landowners support and depend on OFRI to both help them learn about best forest practices and to educate all Oregonians about the wide range of benefits that our forests provide.

OFRI has taken the Audit from the Secretary of State seriously, and has made significant progress in completing the recommendations issued to OFRI. Year after year, OFRI also receives the Chief Financial Office's Gold Star Certificate for accurate and complete fiscal year end information in a timely manner.

Since 1991, OFRI has served as the commodity commission for the forest products sector in Oregon. Like other commodity commissions, OFRI is grower supported, in both funding and confidence in the important and valuable work that OFRI does. When OFRI was created, the state recognized the importance of a strong forest products sector. As urban residents make up most of the population of Oregon today, it is as important as ever to keep OFRI whole, without changing its funding structure, so that Oregonians can learn more about the forests that make up half our state.

Our public education programs at Starker Forests have been in operation for over three decades. We host free elementary school field trips for schools from Benton, Lincoln, Linn and Polk counties. Many of the schools that visit us are Title I schools and do not have any other opportunity for an interactive, hands-on "in the forest" experience. Between 2015 and 2019, OFRI paid for bus costs for over 1800 students and teachers to visit the Starker Forestry Trail. Here, they learn about trees, wood products, plants, streams and riparian areas, water, and wildlife habitat. We think it is important for Oregon's youth to have the opportunity to visit natural places, such as forests, for learning. We host students who have never been on a hike. OFRI is a key partner to Starker Forests, and many other organizations, to make this happen.

Oregon's high school forestry and natural resource curriculum also is sponsored by OFRI. OFRI's education materials correlate with the Oregon Department of Education statewide standards and is supported for use by teachers. CTE teachers are required to have industry exposure and this professional development support from the industry is invaluable. High school students in CTE programs have a higher graduation rate (over 90% across ethnic backgrounds) than other high school students. The forestry and natural resource curriculum in use at over 150 high schools in Oregon is important to support these CTE programs, which provide context to students for real world learning that provides relevance to students who persist in technical subjects.

Finally, as a signatory to the Private Forest Accord (PFA), we believe that all signatories should have a vested interest to be supportive of educating all Oregonians about the changes to the Oregon Forests Practices Act (OFPA). This is particularly important as the over 100 changes to the OFPA take effect over the next few years. OFRI is the organization who can and should do this work.

Starker Forests supports OFRI and we strongly urge you to vote No on HB3019. The health of the forest, the forest products sector, and Oregonian's knowledge about our forests depends on it.

Sincerely,

Randy Hereford  
President/CEO