

February 27, 2023

Senator Jeff Golden
Chair, Senate Committee on Natural Resources
82nd Legislative Assembly
Oregon Senate
Oregon State Capitol

RE: SB 795

Chair Golden, Vice-Chair Girod and Members of the Committee,

When two parties enter into a contract, **both parties have an obligation to uphold their side of the responsibilities** outlined in that agreement. Yet in the case of our forestlands, it is **the State of Oregon who is defaulting on its side** of the agreement, leaving our rural communities deprived of the tax revenues they are owed—and the compounding effect of those losses *for decades*. SB 795 would be a small step towards correcting our State's failure, and I urge your support.

When Counties deeded over hundreds of thousands of acres of forestlands to the state in the 1930's and 1940's, it was agreed that the state would manage those lands for the "greatest permanent value". Yet the Oregon Department of Forestry (DOF) has reduced management practices, repeatedly lowering the revenues off these lands by **harvesting below sustainable levels**.

To make matters worse, the DOF has ignored the input of our counties in their decision making, committing to a Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP) that will further reduce harvest levels on our forestlands—and with it, the tax revenues owed to our rural taxing districts. **This was *not* the agreement the State made with our counties.**

The State has failed to weigh the effect its management decisions have on our counties and has ignored its contractual obligations for these forestlands. Now, our counties want the option to effectively terminate that agreement and reclaim their rightful forestlands—something that is **absolutely reasonable when a contract is in breach**.

I have watched a steady decline of my communities for decades. Some have found avenues to somewhat reinvent themselves, but most? **Timber was all they had**. From jobs, to taxes, to industry, timber was the very life-source of our towns. **And it was taken away**. **Through idealistic policy, and broken promises.**

When you look at a county like Linn and realize that (as of 2021) **nearly \$56 million in revenues have already been lost** compared to a sustainable harvest level (over a \$1 billion loss across 14 counties), you don't even begin to scratch the surface of the true loss to our communities.

The living wage jobs that fed families, helped fund our schools improving the opportunities for the next generation, supporting the emergency services that not only keep our communities safe but allow for (or prohibit) the attraction of new industries to town. The **compounding effect of these losses is truly devastating**, and one look at the current desolate state of our once thriving communities demonstrates too well the depth of this loss.

Our counties were promised our forestlands would be managed in a specific way—for the “greatest permanent value”—and that isn’t what has happened. **Our counties want the opportunity to once again have some say in how *their* forestlands are managed** and start the recovery process for the devastation of the State’s broken promises.

These lands do not belong to the State. They belong to the counties. The State violated the contract by which these lands were deeded over to the State, and therefore should forfeit any and all control over them.

SB 795 gives Counties the *option* to take back what is rightfully theirs, and once again manage these lands as was agreed upon—for the “greatest permanent value”. Our rural communities’ future depends on it.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Jami Cate". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned below the word "Sincerely,".

Jami Cate
State Representative
House District 11