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February 20, 2024

The Honorable Ken Helm, Chair
House Committee on Agriculture, Land Use, Natural Resources, and Water
Oregon State Capitol
Salem, OR 97301

Subject: HB 4106 - **SUPPORT**

Chair Helm, Vice Co-Chair Hartman and Owens and Committee Members:

AOL is the statewide trade association and voice of Oregon's firefighters, loggers, restoration contractors, reforestation companies and other forest operators and we wholeheartedly **support HB 4106**.

Our members, who collectively employ close to 23,000 Oregonians, are deeply committed to the stewardship of Oregon's forests, not just as a livelihood but as a legacy for future generations. The Oregon Board of Forestry's Habitat Conservation Plan, based on data that significantly overestimated state timber harvest by more than 30%, has highlighted a pressing need for accurate, transparent, and accountable decision-making processes. This miscalculation has not only jeopardized the financial stability of timber-dependent counties but also raised concerns about the sustainable funding of the Department's operations, historically supported by timber revenue.

HB 4106 represents a crucial step towards rectifying these issues, ensuring that the Oregon Department of Forestry adheres to principles of good governance by providing reliable data and maintaining accountability in its future decisions. This bill is not about dictating how our forests should be managed but ensuring that the Department's actions are transparent and aligned with its stated intentions.

Your support for HB 4106 is not only an investment in the integrity of our forest management practices but also a commitment to the economic and environmental well-being of Oregon and its residents. I urge you to endorse this bill, reinforcing the foundation of trust and accountability that underpins our collective efforts to sustainably manage Oregon's precious forest resources.

Background and Rationale

The Oregon Department of Forestry (ODF) is charged with the significant responsibility of managing 745,000 acres of state forestland, balancing the diverse interests of numerous stakeholders. This task is complex, given the often conflicting objectives of businesses, counties, local taxing districts, and environmental groups.

The current management practices under the Oregon Department of Forestry (ODF) have led to significant concerns, primarily due to the reliance on inaccurate data for timber harvest projections. This miscalculation has not only jeopardized the financial stability of timber-dependent counties by overestimating harvests by more than 30%, but it has also raised the specter of the ODF requiring up to \$30 million per biennium from the General Fund to sustain its operations. This shift from a self-sustaining model, funded by timber revenue, to one that potentially burdens the state's general fund, underscores the urgent need for reform. HB 4106 aims to address these challenges by mandating the ODF to provide reliable and transparent data,

ensuring that future decisions are grounded in accountability and fostering trust among all stakeholders involved in Oregon's forest management.

Governance and Accountability

House Bill 4106 is pivotal in establishing a new standard for governance and accountability within the Oregon Department of Forestry (ODF). This legislation does not dictate specific forest management practices; instead, it focuses on enhancing the transparency and reliability of data used by ODF in its decision-making processes. By mandating the department to clearly communicate its intentions and adhere to its commitments, HB 4106 aims to rebuild trust among stakeholders, ensuring that future forest management decisions are made with a foundation of accurate and accessible information. This bill represents a significant step towards responsible stewardship of Oregon's forest resources, ensuring their sustainability and the economic stability of communities reliant on them.

Oregon's state forests are a critical multi-billion-dollar asset, playing a central role in the lives of communities surrounding them and the broader state economy. These forests are not only significant for the timber industry but also for the ecosystem services they provide, including water quality, wildlife habitat, and carbon sequestration. The sustainable management of these lands, through scientifically sound practices, ensures the economic stability of thousands of jobs while maintaining the ecological balance necessary for the forests and their benefits to thrive for future generations. The importance of these forests extends beyond their economic value, embodying the deep care and stewardship ethos of Oregonians who wish to see these natural resources prosper in perpetuity.

We call upon the legislators to consider the importance of maintaining Oregon's state forests as self-sustaining assets that not only support the Department of Forestry but also provide crucial revenues to forest trust counties and sustain local businesses and communities. The question before us is whether we are prepared to shoulder the financial responsibilities that may arise from inadequate forest management practices. We urge you to consider the benefits of a sustainable harvest calculation like that in Washington State, which ensures accountability to both the legislature and the communities it serves. Let's choose a path that maintains our forests' sustainability and economic viability for generations to come.

Conclusion

In conclusion, HB 4106 is good governance, transparency, and accountability in the management of Oregon's invaluable forest resources. By supporting this bill, we collectively affirm our commitment to sustainable forest management practices that benefit not only the current but also future generations of Oregonians. We urge the committee to endorse HB 4106, thereby reinforcing the foundation of trust and stewardship that is essential for the prosperity and resilience of Oregon's forests and communities.

Graciously,



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