

March 21, 2025

Senate Committee On Rules

RE: Opposition to SB 1051

Chair Senator Jama, Vice-Chair Senator Bonham, and members of the committee,

My name is Mike Barsotti. I am a family forest landowner in the Lyons area, an OSU graduate forester with 50 years working to protect and enhance Oregon's forests, an Oregon Department of Forestry retiree, and a member of Oregon's two major family forest landowner organizations, the Oregon Small Woodlands Association and Oregon Tree Farms System.

I am opposed to SB 1051 for two major reasons: first, the State Forester not being required to be a practical forester, and two, the governor selecting the State Forester.

The understanding of what makes a healthy, sustainable forest is ever evolving. There is value in the State Forester as an experienced forester who understands the history of this evolution and concepts on what is needed to strengthen sustainability. I remember when our State Forester returned from an international conference on forestry and introduced ODF to the concept of forest sustainability being the balancing of the economic, environmental and social components that make up a forest. I'm sure his understanding of issues facing Oregon's forests led him to understand the importance of this concept. There is also the issue of who would represent Oregon at the National Association of State Foresters gatherings, our State Forester or an assistant?

My second concern is the more important. Having the governor hire and fire the State Forester moves the Board of Forestry towards just an advisory committee with the governor setting forestry policy directions. Developing sound, science supported forest policy is difficult.

The Board of Forestry is made of members representing the three forestry components: economic, environmental, and social products and values. It is balancing the products and values these components that provides for a healthy sustainable forest.

It is not an easy task to find this balance. For example, with my 50 years of practicing forestry in Oregon, no matter how hard I try to balance the three components, it will not be the same as that of a wildlife biologist or recreationist. When individuals representing these components tackle policy issues together, Oregon gets closer to long term forest sustainability. To assume an individual will be more successful makes no sense.

In the past there have been many examples of governors attempting to stack the Board of Forestry with individuals that represent their viewpoint. It has been the Senate through its approval responsibilities that Board members continue to represent these three components our forests provide our State and country.

I see no value in change. Having the Department of Forestry's priorities swing from one governor to the next as new governors take office makes little sense. Also, the history of Board of Forestry policy development is remarkable.

A Board of Forestry overseeing ODF with an experienced State Forester has served Oregon well for over 100 years. For example, the Board of Forestry shepherded in the nation's first Forest Practice Act (FPA), and through its rule making process has modified the FPA rules as science has shown a need. Another example: former U.S. Under Secretary of Agriculture Jim Hubbard has stated that Oregon Department of Forestry's fire program is the envy of all state forestry programs. So again, I see no reason to change.

In summary, moving the hiring and firing of the State Forester from the Board to the governor moves the Board to an advisory committee. A Board with authority over ODF and with broad representation and the responsibility to find the balance of products and values from our forests has proven successful. Giving that responsibility to one individual is not a step forward.

Thank you for providing the opportunity to share my views on this important piece of legislation.