

March 22, 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 Brenda McComb, from Philomath, Oregon. I hold a PhD in Forestry, and I have been a forestry professor and administrator at three land grant universities across the country including 20 years at Oregon State University. My testimony is based on my education and experience, including 6 years of service to Oregon on the Oregon Board of Forestry.

I write to oppose SB 1051. It is not clear to me what problem this Bill is attempting to address. The Board has been and continues to be effective in working with the State Forester and the Governor, despite philosophical differences among Board members, to move forward forest policies important to Oregonians. That success is built on a strong relationship between the Board and the State Forester. The Bill seems a solution in search of a problem. No such solution is needed.

While I agree that the position description for the State Forester should be broadened to represent administrative expertise in future State Foresters, there also should be a requirement for evidence of training and/or experience in natural resources management to allow the State Forester to work effectively with ODF staff, stakeholders, and leaders of other state and federal agencies. Removing authority for hiring and supervising the State Forester from the Board and transferring that authority to the Governor's Office is highly problematic. I list five such concerns below but also point out that the current structure of the Board collectively has decades of experience hiring and supervising employees in the natural resources field, including administrators. The current Board consists of two forest managers, two forest policy experts, a retired Forest Service administrator, a retired owner of a large business, and a retired forest scientist and administrator. Collectively they have hired thousands of employees including

administrators. The ability for future boards to have this level of expertise is dependent on Governor appointments.

But there are strategic implications of passing this Bill that I ask you to consider. Such a change in authority to hire and supervise a State Forester would inhibit the Board's ability to effectively meet the complex challenges related to forests and forest management for the following reasons:

1 – A shift in authority from a Board with knowledge, experience and connections to forests and forest issues throughout the state would be made to a smaller number of politically appointed individuals with less relevant knowledge, experience and connection to the forests and forest communities.

2 – Such a change in authority would lead to erosion of an effective partnership between the Board and a State Forester who, if this Bill passes, would be a political appointee whose term in office may change with each election cycle rather than someone recruited, hired, and supervised by the Board with which the State Forester would work most closely.

3 –The proposed change would shift authority and responsibility that is dispersed and shared between the Board and the Governor working in close partnership to ensure quality leadership of the agency to an arrangement where authority would be placed in the hands of one individual, whose role and political affiliation is subject to change in each election cycle.

4 -- The Board needs to work collaboratively with a State Forester who will make decisions grounded in a long view of the future of Oregon's forests. We should not replace that relationship with one that is less likely to provide the continuity and long view that is the foundation of responsible policy making and leadership. Development and implementation of forest policies leave imprints on Oregon's landscapes that last for generations. The long view is essential to meet the expectations of Oregonians now and for generations into the future.

5 –As stated above, during their careers Board members have recruited, hired and supervised thousands of employees, including administrators. The current Board has experience attracting and retaining strong applicants for the forestry-related positions. Current and future Boards can

use their experience to recruit and hire future State Foresters while being insulated from the realities of rapidly cycling state electoral politics.

I urge the Committee to retain authority for hiring and supervising the State Forester with the Oregon Board of Forestry but ask that the qualifications for a State Forester be expanded to reflect experience and/or training in natural resources management as part of the position description. Thank you for considering my testimony.

