



HB 2357: Eliminating OFRI and redirecting the resources

Testimony for House Ag and Natural Resources – Jody Wisner – 3.2.2021

Tax Fairness Oregon believes that OFRI should no longer receive public funding, that the State should stop collecting dues (taxes) for what is clearly the mouthpiece of the commercial industry, and that the organization itself should be closed down. Forestry education and communications need to be independent of industry influences. One simply needs to read the *Trees to Tap* report itself and compare it to the summary on the OFRI website to see that they have sought to distort the findings of the research and influence public policy by suppressing independently-verified climate research on carbon sequestration in forests.

We are glad to see this bill. We are less certain that funding the new Sound Forestry Practices Subaccount section within the Department of Forestry is the best place to put the roughly \$4 million per year that we would continue to collect; the department has not demonstrated any movement towards improving the weaknesses in Oregon's forest practices laws that the EPA cited a decade ago that have caused landslides, sedimentation in drinking water, and costly water system remediation by local communities.

We believe the revenue could be better directed to one of the urgent issues of:

- wildfire costs
- home hardening and community preparedness, or
- addressing water system damaged by weak forest practices.

These seem a higher priority than a new section at ODF.

We think the rate should be \$4.13 per thousand board feet indexed for inflation since established two years ago, and then indexed going forward with a sunset in four to six years. That way if the legislature is unable to enact better legislation, at least the rate will not need to be approved every biennium.

It is time to get the legislature out of the businesses of re-establishing rates for the Harvest Tax every two years.

Defunding OFRI and redirecting that revenue to other uses is a good initial step for this year.

We also believe that this is the year to enact a real severance tax that returns property tax revenues to counties that the legislature stripped from them years ago. We are hopeful that you will act on more than one front in addressing forestry industry issues.

We read the bills and follow the money