

November 16, 2022

Oregon Board of Forestry
2600 State Street
Salem, Oregon 97310

Salem, OR

Dear Chair Kelly and Members of the Board:

We wish to express our gratitude for the direction you have given to the Oregon Department of Forestry in drafting the **Western Oregon State Forest Habitat Conservation Plan**. Ever since the Oregon Plan for salmon and watersheds was drafted nearly a quarter century ago, there has not been a comprehensive plan to recover other species of concern that reside on our state forest lands.

Since the time Oregon coastal coho were listed under the Endangered Species Act (“ESA”), other species, both economically and ecologically important, have been driven to dangerously low levels, further compromising the chance for recovery. This year, the take of wild fall Chinook was closed in the entire Tillamook Basin, due to depressed numbers of adults returning to the watershed. These closures in the Tillamook and constraining opportunities in other north coast watersheds severely compromised a \$200 million dollar a year industry that depends on abundant fish and wildlife in Tillamook and Clatsop Counties. In the last two decades, we’ve never witnessed so little opportunity to pursue salmon on the North Coast, it’s an indication that we have a critical problem.

The North Coast’s wild salmon and steelhead are a forest product too, a product that seems to be disappearing off of the land and waterscape. We believe the Habitat Conservation Plan will address the needs of these fish, and give them a chance to recover, along with the North Coast recreation economy.

It is for this reason, we believe the board and agency should seek the maximum protections modeled under **Alternative 3** providing “**increased conservation**” for species of concern. Long gone are the 40, 50 and 60-pound Chinook the Tillamook State Forest used to produce, and in many cases, we’re failing to meet minimum spawning escapement goals for several runs of wild salmon.

Furthermore, it’s time we look at the business model for harvesting timber off of our public lands. For all too long, the budgets of rural Oregon have been tied to the amount of timber harvested off of these lands. While historically this has been good for the counties, science is showing the increased benefits to fish, wildlife, clean water and mitigating the harmful effect of climate change for keeping trees on the landscape. It’s time we examine another model that keeps counties whole, while enabling this beneficial natural resource to perform the ecological benefits that they evolved to produce.

Given the relatively young age of the stands that currently exist on the North Coast, we’ve lost the many benefits older-aged trees produce for our ecosystems. Mature riparian areas, tree/stream recruitment in the steep-sloped watersheds of the basin and the ability for the watershed to absorb the torrential rains that cause landslides and sediment on the spawning beds are just some of these benefits.

Decoupling the timber harvest/county funding relationship would be a win-win for Oregonians. It would provide more stable funding for county services in times of volatile timber prices and fulfill the true obligation of Oregon to manage these public lands for a multitude of uses; economically, ecologically and socially.

Adopting the HCP and developing a decoupling strategy for Oregon's public lands is bold and necessary. As the needs of Oregonians change, so must our strategies to meet those needs.

Thank you for your service to the state of Oregon, we urge you to move forward with **Alternative 3** for the Western Oregon State Forest Habitat Conservation Plan and a strategy that alleviates rural Oregonian's budgets based on the amount of timber harvested from public lands.

In Gratitude,

Bob Rees, professional fishing guide, Bay City, Oregon