

Dear Chair Clem and Members of the House Agriculture, Natural Resources and Rural Communities Committee:

As Chair of the Oregon Board of Forestry, I appreciate the opportunity to provide you these comments regarding House Bill 3072. This statement is provided on behalf of the full Board, which met and discussed their position on the Bill on April 20, 2009. The Board respectfully stands in opposition to this and other potential legislation that would affect the statutory mandate for how state forests are managed and/or funded.

House Bill 3072 would change the definition of “greatest permanent value” used to describe the management of state forests that are under the purview of the Oregon Board of Forestry. The bill would also apply this definition in statute to Common School Lands, although the management authority and goals for those lands derive from the Oregon Constitution.

The new definition would mandate that management of Board of Forestry lands place timber production that provides revenue to counties as the highest priority. The current definition gives no explicit priority to any particular use, but outlines a range of permissible uses that may or may not be provided.

The broad wording in statute has invited ongoing debate as to what constitutes the right mix of environmental, social and economic benefits to be provided by these lands. The public discussion has included a statewide ballot measure, and engagement by the legislature and Governor. The Board of Forestry itself has spent significant hours listening to interest groups, analyzing options, sharpening its understanding based on updated modeling and other information provided by the Department of Forestry, and debating direction. As a result, the Board is being responsive to broad concerns and is now engaged in the following actions.

1. Administratively, the Board has moved from a “Ten-Year” review cycle for the State Forest Management Plan to a biennial review, based now on specific performance measures used to track the achievement of the Plan’s goals for attaining “greatest permanent value.” We feel this makes the plan a more dynamic tool that responds to stakeholder interests and new science in a more timely fashion.
2. Under this new cycle and use of performance measures the Board is completing its review of proposed changes that would increase revenues generated from timber harvest and revise strategies for the management of species of concern. As a trade-off, long-term goals for complex habitat structure would be lowered, but short term complex structure goals would be increased and more strategically allocated on the ground. Final action on this recommendation is anticipated at the June 2009 Board meeting.

As part of a necessary review, I will soon be recommending to the Board of Forestry that we undertake a fundamental review of the definition of greatest permanent value, management focus and planning processes as currently established in Oregon Administrative Rule. The purpose will be to:

- a. Describe a management focus that fully acknowledges the interdependence among social, economic and environmental benefits and the importance of providing sufficient levels for all three. It is critical we understand that the most sustainable systems are those that generate adequate public support and commitment for all uses, those that protect the environmental values upon which economic returns and social benefits depend, and those that generate enough revenue to pay for environmental and social benefits.
- b. Based on these interrelationships, construct a definition for greatest permanent value that more specifically establishes what outputs would result from an approach that balances economic, environmental and social benefits. The intent would be to pre-empt polarizing discussions that presume one set of benefits is most important and must be provided before others can be considered.
- c. Develop a planning process that gives the Board sufficient policy engagement and oversight while improving the plan's flexibility, adaptability and decision space for managers.

The Oregon Board of Forestry acknowledges the need for more dynamic and responsive approaches to managing state forests, and is interested in actions that will yield improved outcomes for the citizens of Oregon. We appreciate the level of interest shown by the legislature and ask that the Board of Forestry be given the proper opportunity to address the concerns that you seek to act upon with BM 3072.

Sincerely,

John L. Blackwell, Chair  
Board of Forestry