

Neah-Kah-Nie School District 56

504 North Third Avenue • PO Box 28, Rockaway Beach, OR 97136
(503) 355-2222 • Fax (503) 355-3434

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Oregon Board of Forestry
Oregon Department of Forestry
Salem Headquarters
2600 State Street
Salem, Oregon 97310

Members of the Board of Forestry:

On behalf of the 800-plus students in the Neah-Kah-Nie School District and their families throughout north Tillamook County, I encourage the Board of Forestry to fulfill its financial obligations to Forest Trust counties by setting harvest rates on state forest lands that will meet our shared conservation goals while allowing for the maximum sustained yield production and harvest of forest crops.

Our school district and our five schools (Neah-Kah-Nie High School, Neah-Kah-Nie Middle School, Garibaldi Grade School, Nehalem Elementary School, and Neah-Kah-Nie Preschool) serve over 800 students from Bay City to Manzanita. The school district is recognized for outstanding schools: Nehalem Elementary is a Model I Title School, the top 5% in Oregon. Last year, Neah-Kah-Nie High School was ranked 16th in Oregon by US News and World Report. The pre-school received an Oregon Department of Education innovation grant. These accolades are indicative of our high quality staff. The district employees approximately 125 staff. Together we strive to provide the highest quality education to all of our students.

Like many of the school districts in Forest Trust counties, we are reliant upon monies derived from timber sales on Forest Trust Lands. In fact, we are more dependent than the vast majority as we are one of the few districts that do not receive State School Support. Neah-Kah-Nie School District receives its revenue through local funding: property taxes and timber revenue. Approximately 25% of our district's funding is sourced from timber sales on the Tillamook State Forest. Neah-Kah-Nie School District is proof that local school funding works, we are excellent stewards of timber revenue.

We use this funding to enhance educational opportunities for our students. While schools throughout the state are struggling with overcrowded classrooms and program cuts, our students enjoy manageable class sizes where they receive more personalized instruction; music, band, choir, physical education, and a wide assortment of extra-curricular activities. Our classrooms are equipped with technology that help students excel in literacy, math and science; and we offer two sessions of preschool for our youngest students.

We have been able to build this strong foundation in large part due to funding from timber source lands and we have been able to continue offering these services in spite of decreasing diminishing timber receipts and increasing uncertainty about funding levels. However, our ability to offer the quality education and services that our families expect becomes more difficult each year as state forest lands continue to go underutilized.

Providing a top tier education is dependent on a stable source of timber revenue. For the school district, a management plan that dedicates 70% of Trust Lands to timber production and 30% to conservation is a viable plan. This is why I am here today.

As this body is well aware, the Oregon Department of Forestry is only harvesting roughly half of the annual growth on Trust Lands. This is not a new trend and every year that excess volume is added to the growing standing inventory at the expense of the counties, communities, special districts, and school districts that are reliant upon an equitable harvest rate and corresponding timber sales to fund critical services. New funding from Trust Lands is simply not coming in at the needed level. Our district has been dependent on reserves from 2007-2008 and that can only take us so far. We are in the midst of planning for our next financial year and, as it currently stands, the upcoming budget presents real challenges and tough choices that will impact our students and our employees in the near future. And I know we are not alone. Besides the 125 Neah-Kah-Nie School District employees and their families, entire communities throughout the state are looking down the same barrel; we are looking to this Board for action.

I strongly encourage the Board of Forestry to take steps to ensure an equitable management plan that will meet the twin goals of conservation and the social/financial needs of small, Oregon communities. We believe dedicating 70% of Trust Lands to timber production while setting aside up to 30% of those lands for conservation will meet those twin goals. In doing so, this Board will help school districts like ours continue to do our best for our students in the classroom while also ensuring that those students have beautiful, healthy forests in which to explore.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,



Paul Erlebach

Superintendent, Neah-Kah-Nie School District