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Oregon Board of Forestry
2660 State Street
Salem, OR 97310

RE: Developing Riparian Rule Prescriptions

Chair Imeson, State Forester Decker, and members of the Board of Forestry:

My name is Steve Tesch and I am the Director of Research for the College of Forestry at Oregon State University. In that capacity, I'm here today to provide a brief reminder of the scientific research being conducted through the Watersheds Research Cooperative—the "WRC." The work of the WRC is very relevant to the Board's work on stream rules, specifically the effects of contemporary forest practices on stream temperature and fish. I am not here today to take a position on any of the policy issues pending before the Board.

The WRC uses a collaborative, multi-disciplinary approach, involving 22 cooperators, including OSU, Oregon Department of Forestry, state and federal agencies, and private sector researchers and managers. The WRC also uses a robust scientific process. Data gathering for each of the three major studies—the Hinkle, Trask, and Alsea Revisited—has spanned more than a decade. Early results have been actively shared through workshops, fieldtrips, and conferences. Findings from completed studies are being published in peer reviewed scientific journals. Updating the scientific literature on this topic has been a primary goal of the WRC since its inception.

These studies are the product of significant public and private investments. They were designed to help us determine effects of current forest management practices, as regulated by today's forest practices rules, on aquatic ecosystems and fish populations. One of the valuable aspects of paired watershed studies is that they consider impacts at the watershed scale, and thus are able to provide information on downstream and cumulative effects. Included in the watershed scale approach is detailed research on specific segments of streams. Together, watershed scale and reach level information is useful for addressing a broad range of policy questions.

It would be convenient if these studies were already completed and the results published and before you now, however the process takes time. After 10 years of study, the data gathering for Hinkle Creek was completed in 2011. The Trask and the Alsea Revisited studies are nearing completion, with the final year for data collection in 2016. As we reach the end of the data collection phase, the focus turns to analyzing and publishing the findings.

The amount of data collected over the last several years in these watersheds is staggering. We've amassed a world-class information set. We have data analyzing the connections between riparian vegetation and stream temperature, invertebrates, and fish responses. There are data measuring turbidity, light levels, algae presence, birds, and amphibians. This effort has already provided us a library of important information regarding these variables and at completion in approximately 2 years will produce even more.

Preliminary results from the research have demonstrated very interesting findings—findings relevant to your work today. Results from all three paired watershed studies indicate that, while there are detectable impacts from modern forest management practices in Oregon, they are small, short-lived, and well within the range of natural variability. We are not seeing negative effects on fish or fish habitat, either in the short term or long term.

We are diligently seeking funding to complete the analysis, peer review, and publication of the results of these three studies. As these studies bear fruit over the next several years we will learn more about the effects of contemporary forest management on aquatic habitat. This will no doubt inform policy conversations, aiding the Board of Forestry and others as they seek to base Oregon's forest management policies on sound science. Indeed this was the goal of the WRC research, to inform policy decisions; just as the original Alsea paired watershed study did back in the early 1970's with the development of the Oregon Forest Practices Act.

As scientists we want to be helpful in providing information that will aid your decisions. I encourage the Board of Forestry to keep in mind the research being conducted by the WRC as you contemplate actions now and in the future.

Respectfully,



Steven D. Tesch
Director of Research
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