

Cascadia Wildlands

we like it wild.

September 9, 2015

Tom Imeson, Chair
Oregon Board of Forestry
2600 State Street
Salem, Oregon 97310

Chair Imeson and Board of Forestry members:

For the record, my name is Josh Laughlin, and I'm the Executive Director of Eugene-based Cascadia Wildlands. I'm representing our 14,000 members and supporters in the region and here today to speak briefly about the disposition of the 93,000-acre Elliott State Forest.

Cascadia Wildlands has a long history advocating for the treasured forests, waterways and species found on the Elliott and has for years encouraged an alternative arrangement on the forest that doesn't pit K-12 school funding against old-growth forest protection. That day has come and a unique opportunity must be seized.

As you are aware, the State Land Board is currently in the process of disposing of the Elliott to make the Common School Fund whole and has laid out a creative protocol to direct this effort. We see this as an incredible opportunity for an agency like the Oregon Department of Forestry, in close collaboration with other stakeholders, to acquire this forest for the outstanding values it offers and to manage it under a new mandate that more reflects the values held close by Oregonians, including for clean water, imperiled salmon and wildlife, carbon storage to mitigate climate change, restoration timber and watershed jobs and for recreation. We were encouraged to read the Board and Department's July 24 letter to the Department of State Lands expressing an interest in public ownership and management of the Elliott.

Conversely, an outcome for the Elliott that I believe most Oregonians want to see avoided is one that privatizes this public forest, where hunters, anglers and other recreation enthusiasts are locked out of their former playground and met with "no trespassing" signs. This isn't an unrealistic scenario and has already occurred on recently sold parcels on the Elliott State Forest, and it underscores the need to work together for a solution.

We recognize there are immense hurdles to clear for an acquisition of this magnitude, but believe that with enough creative minds working together with a shared vision, a legacy outcome could be achieved. We stand by ready to help build the political and social momentum necessary to ensure an outcome is secured that future generations of Oregonians will be forever grateful for.

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We encourage you and the Department to work with stakeholders on a shared vision for the Elliott and to pursue this unique and timely opportunity. Thanks for your time.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Josh Laughlin". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Josh Laughlin
Executive Director