



August, 13, 2015

To: Governor Kate Brown
Secretary of State Jeanne Atkins
State Treasurer Ted Wheeler

Re: Agenda Item 3, Elliott State Forest

The League of Women Voters of Oregon (LWVOR) is a non-partisan political organization that encourages informed and active citizen participation in government. The League of Women Voters believes that natural resources such as forests, and the animals and plants living within them, should be managed as interrelated parts of life-supporting ecosystems. We have positions in support of Parks and Water Quality that apply to this issue. Additionally, we support a stable state system for financing public schools.

We have reviewed the latest staff report providing options on assuring the Elliott State Forest is recognized for resources that should be conserved and protected for their future availability, particularly the over 40,000 acres of forestlands on the Elliott State Forest that have never been logged or consist of 100-year old tree stands and the headwaters of streams from which drinking water begins. **(This is a greater percentage than your proposed order.)** These native rainforests provide critical habitat for a host of species teetering on the brink of extinction like the marbled murrelet and northern spotted owl and should be preserved for the physical, chemical and biological integrity of ecosystems and to protect public health. We appreciate the work of your consultant and your staff as they have met with a wide variety of stakeholders to seek solutions.

The best transition scenario, and the best management strategy, decouples old-growth clearcutting from school funding, protects the Elliott's remaining native forests, wild salmon and imperiled wildlife, safeguards the Elliott for drinking water, public recreational and educational opportunities, and promotes timber jobs by restoratively thinning the second-growth tree farms.

We read the responses from state and federal agencies with both hope and dismay as we seek fair market value for the Common School Fund while recognizing the iconic public value of this forest. Fisheries experts have determined that streams originating in the Elliott support nearly 25% of the wild Coho salmon productivity in Oregon. This underscores the need to safeguard the Forest, which in turn protects the water quality critical to Coho survival and the fisheries industry which is so important to coastal communities.

We also recognize the need for local communities to reap some benefit from the second growth timber where Endangered Species Act issues don't exist and the headwaters of streams are protected. We believe that using Oregon's forest collaborative approach to get an agreed upon harvest could be considered as a tool in identifying harvest areas. Of critical importance is that raw logs stay in those communities to be milled by local mills. Private timber companies can choose other options. The state forests have become the lifesaver for local mills.

Although you are considering selling the forest as ONE tract, we note that a variety of state agencies expressed interest in portions of the forest to advance their individual missions. **Returning to the Legislature with a clear plan to have the state purchase the forest from the Common School Fund over a six-year period would increase the School Fund for investment (now averaging over 8% over the long**

term) while moving this important property into public ownership. A multiple agency management plan for the long term could be developed to address the multiple public uses of this important Forest.

LWVOR acknowledges that this is a very difficult issue. Our schools, local jobs and protection of our forests are all important and one should not have to be chosen at the expense of another. Below are excerpts from the responses of the various agencies your staff contacted as a guide to that further discussion. This is new information and why we ask for a delay. **We also need time to confer with legislators to discern their interest in such a proposal.** In the recent past, they have been willing to purchase forest lands in the Gilchrist area (with state bonding dollars of over \$22 million along with \$3 million of federal dollars) and they have budgeted millions for the purchase of parks and for preserving special places for environmental purposes. (Note the recent purchase of 10,000 acres on the lower Deschutes River.) Although this purchase would acknowledge an increased public use and stewardship, and as the Department of Forestry mentions, require a clear legislative directive for their management mission, this purchase could be a fit for Department of Forestry ownership. Perhaps a partnership with the Oregon Fish and Wildlife Department in that management could be a solution. It puts both major stakeholder interests together to build a positive future for the Elliott.

If the increased revenue to the Common School fund from investing the purchase dollars is significantly greater than the cost of any debt service to the state, then K-12 schools would benefit and the state budget would not be harmed by such a plan. In fact, our state would have an incredible public resource (including jobs and the environment) for those same schoolchildren and future generations. The local communities would have an incredible tourist attraction and jobs in fisheries, timber and environmental restoration. We also note that the Department of Transportation may be able to reimburse any state agency consortium that purchases the forest through the use of mitigation credits. We know that there is interest in the purchase of carbon credits, again another revenue stream from the forest that does not harm its intrinsic value.

In conclusion, the Elliott State Forest has become an Oregon icon. As such, **the League supports a plan for the state to purchase the Elliott State Forest. We ask that you delay voting on the proposed Order to give us time to work on our proposal. Should you move forward with requests for proposals, we ask that you—as our statewide decision makers—maintain the option of rejecting any proposal brought forward.** We stand ready to work with you and others to develop a plan for public ownership of the Elliott.

Sincerely,



Norman Turrill,
LWVOR President



Jennifer A. Haynes
LWVOR Natural Resources, Forestry Portfolio



Peggy Lynch
Natural Resources Coordinator

cc: Richard Whitman, Governor's Natural Resources Policy Advisor
(Richard.M.Whitman@oregon.gov)
Rachele Altman, Secretary of State's Policy Advisor (Rachele.Altman@state.or.us)
Kristin Johnson, State Treasurer's Policy Advisor (Kristin.Johnson@ost.state.or.us)

Mary Abrams, Director, Department of State Lands (Mary.M.Abrams@dsl.state.or.us)
John Potter, Project Manager, Department of State Lands (John.R.Potter@state.or.us)
Jim Paul, Department of State Lands (Jim.Paul@state.or.us)
Liz Dent, Oregon Department of Forestry (Liz.S.Dent@oregon.gov)
Stephanie Hallock Cummins, Consultant (stephanie.cummins@dsl.state.or.us)
Senator Arnie Roblan (Sen.ArnieRoblan@state.or.us)
Representative Caddie McKeown (Rep.CaddyMcKeown@state.or.us)
Coos County Commissioners (bbrooks@co.coos.or.us)
League of Women Voters of Coos County (Kathy Metzger (rkmetzger890@gmail.com) and
Frances Smith (franceshallsmith@gmail.com))

Excerpts from agency letters:

Oregon Department of Forestry (July 24, 2015): “The Board and Department are both interested in acquiring the Elliott State Forest..... addto nearly 9,000 acres of Board of Forestry-owned lands... ..interested in being part of a consortium....Additional statutory authority would likely be required for the Board to hold title to the lands and manage for a wider range of policy objectives.”

Oregon State University (July 31, 2015): “...if there is a long-term ownership option that includes public or public/private partnerships.....the College of Forestry would be excited to.....actively work as a partner to make the new structure a success.”

Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board (June 29, 2015): “...the agency grants funds to organizations.....that then either purchase the property or a conservation easement over the property.....A grantee can subsequently transfer the property interest to a state.....” “.....OWEB occasionally grants funds for a property that is proposed for transfer to another entity.”

Oregon Fish and Wildlife Department (August 5, 2015): “There are areas that contain important late successional stage forest habitats and aquatic habitats that support listed species. Subject to the previously mentioned staff and resource limitations, ODFW is interested in collaborating on future management of these areas to address fish and wildlife habitat values.”

Oregon Department of Transportation (June 23, 2015): “The Department is currently studying comprehensive banking approaches for mitigation....., the Elliot State Forest may be a good site for a large-scale private mitigation bank to purchase and develop mitigation credits for sale to users within an expanded service area. The Department would be interested in purchasing future credits.....ifestablished on the Elliot State Forest.”

Oregon Parks and Recreation Department (July 13, 2015): “The PRC does not have an interest in owning or managing any portion of the Elliot State Forest.”

U. S. Forest Service/Siuslaw District (July 2, 2015): “The Forest Service is, in principle very interested in exploring re-incorporating some or all of the Elliott State Forest into the Suislaw National Forest.would require specific authorization and funding from the United States Congress.”



LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS®
OF OREGON

September 3, 2015

Tom Imeson, Chair
Oregon Board of Forestry
c/o Doug Decker, State Forester
(Doug.S.Decker@oregon.gov)

Re: Elliott State Forest Common School Lands – Encouraging your Move Forward

The League of Women Voters is a nonpartisan, grassroots political organization that encourages informed and active participation in government. As such, the League spoke up at the August 13th State Land Board meeting regarding the future of the Elliott State Forest. (Attached is that letter.)

We also read with encouragement your July 24th response to an inquiry by the Department of State Lands regarding the future of the Elliott. We stand ready to work with you to find the resources so that the Elliott can become a state asset under the multiple criteria set up by the State Land Board. Public ownership of the Elliott is crucial to its future. We are ready to support legislation to provide that greater guidance you would need to manage the forest—perhaps in conjunction with other state agencies—and to support a financing mechanism that both recognizes the need for the Common School Fund to disinvest in this iconic Oregon forest and the passionate desire of Oregonians to see this iconic forest held in public ownership for its multiple values: jobs, protecting 100-year-old forests for their diversity in providing habitat for threatened and endangered species and their potential for carbon sequestration, safeguarding streams that provide drinking water and habitat for wild Coho and other aquatic species, and allowing the public recreational and educational opportunities.

We ask that you direct the Department of Forestry to continue work with others, to provide an “Expression of Interest” to the State Land Board by December 15, 2015, and develop whatever partnerships may be available to meet the Protocol set forth by the State Land Board and keep the Elliott a public treasure.

Thank you for your leadership in this area. We look forward to working with you.

Sincerely,

Norman Turrill
President

Peggy Lynch
Natural Resources Coordinator

Attached: August 13, 2015 letter to the Governor, Secretary of State and State Treasurer

cc: Richard Whitman, Governor’s Natural Resources Policy Advisor (Richard.M.Whitman@oregon.gov)
Mary Abrams, Director, Department of State Lands (Mary.M.Abrams@dsl.state.or.us)