

June 2, 2009

John Blackwell, Chair, Oregon Board of Forestry  
c/o Oregon Department of Forestry  
2600 State Street  
Salem, Oregon 97310

Dear Chair Blackwell and the Oregon Board of Forestry:

I am writing to you regarding your upcoming decision on the management of the Tillamook and Clatsop State Forests.

I have had a long involvement in forest policy in Oregon, dating back to the two rewrites of the Oregon Forest Practices Act in 1987 and 1991 when I was President of the State Senate, and carrying through to the development of the management plan for the Tillamook and Clatsop State Forests during my service as Governor from 1995-2003.

I write you today with the hope that my experience and perspective on the state forests may be valuable in your considerations at your June 3 meeting and afterward.

The context for your deliberations on June 3 is reminiscent of the situation you faced in 2003. As in past sessions, there is a bill in the legislature, HB 3072, which makes timber production the primary purpose of the state forests.

Given the political pressure, I commend you for your recent public stance against HB 3072 and in favor of an integrated and science based approach to greatest permanent value. The call for timber primacy in HB 3072 erodes attempts to develop a sustainable forest policy, as would a call to make the state forests a park. We must move beyond the politically-driven see-saw approach to management of these lands, and your stand against HB 3072 takes us in the right direction.

As your Board's diverse membership works to find common ground on June 3, I offer the following advice based on my own attempts to make progress by focusing on the commonly shared goal of enhancing the health of these state forests.

**Take the long view, and keep a strong restorative vision for the Tillamook and Clatsop State Forests.**

Our ancestors severely depleted this rich ecosystem through fires and outdated logging methods and the forest is still recovering, even as harvests have increased. If we continue to prioritize the restoration of the health of these forests, I am confident the day will come when we can produce more timber than is possible under the current plan while also adequately providing for the many other forest values. But we are not there yet.

Older forest structure is scarce on the north coast landscape, and historically abundant species remain at risk. An ambitious target for older and more complex forest structure will create more options than it will eliminate both in terms of fish and wildlife habitat and timber volume available in the future. I believe we should leave some options for our children rather than managing public lands at the edge of sustainability. At the same time, the forest designated as complex habitat remains open to appropriate thinning projects that can produce significant revenue in the short run.

Similar long-range benefits would accrue through a strong, long-term Salmon Anchor Strategy on the state forests. The combination of improved stream buffers and limits on timber harvest in these steep and sensitive areas will support the recovery of listed salmon runs. Thousands of Oregonians pour millions of dollars into the coastal economy through salmon fishing, so minimizing damage to fish habitat in Salmon Anchor Habitats seems both environmentally and economically prudent.

**Watershed health should be your ultimate goal, and your plans should be supported with peer reviewed and interdisciplinary science – for both environmental and economic reasons.**

When the current plan was first developed in the 1990s, it included an extensive peer review of the proposed strategies. It will be no surprise that the peer review enhanced the biological credibility of the current plan, but more surprising is that it also enhanced the plan's economic performance.

In the early 1990s, our lack of an overarching and science-based plan for state forests disrupted the timber sale program. Since the 2001 forest plan has been in place, the problems with litigation over the timber sale program have largely ended. Similarly, if you now move toward intensive management without peer-reviewed science, we might return to the old cycle of litigation – with the threat of federal intervention, new listed species, and lower timber harvests than the current plan offers.

**State forests can make an important contribution to the funding of public services, but we cannot harvest beyond what would result in a healthy forest ecosystem.**

The Tillamook and Clatsop Forests can make a real contribution to the public coffers, but they cannot solve the problem of funding public services. These state lands are, after all, only three percent of Oregon's forested landscape, and they are surrounded by private forestland that is likely to be heavily harvested over time. These public lands are important to the survival of fish and wildlife species in Northwest Oregon, where most of the surrounding land is in private ownership. I agree that we need better funding mechanisms for our counties and the valuable services they provide; on the other hand, we cannot do so at the expense of healthy watersheds.

**The greatest impact the state forests can have on the statewide economy is to create a scientifically credible and sustainable model for all public land in Oregon.**

As noted in my previous comments to you, these forests could make an enormous contribution to the state's economic vitality by serving as a model of integrated and science-based forest management.

By seeking a truly restorative *and* economically productive vision for the state lands, the Board can gain credibility essential to enhancing Oregon's voice on federal land management. We are in desperate need of common ground on our federal lands.

Board members, I deeply appreciate and respect your service to Oregon. I know you will believe me when I tell you that I understand the difficult decisions you face. I hope my suggestions are of some assistance in your search for the balance that we so dearly need in our forests.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John A. Kitzhaber". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "John" being the most prominent.

John A. Kitzhaber, M.D.  
Governor, State of Oregon 1995-2003