May 22, 2013

Joint Ways and Means Subcommittee on Natural Resources
Oregon Legislature
900 Court Street NE
Salem, OR 97301

RE: Support for Oregon State University Forestry and Natural Resources Extension budget

Dear Co-Chairs Sen. Edwards and Rep. Unger and Subcommittee Members:

Those of us who serve on the Committee for Family Forestlands thank you again for the opportunity you’ve given us to voice our support for the Department of Forestry’s base budget and for HB 2050, the Wildfire Protection Act. Through its expertise, on-the-ground assistance, and fire management capabilities, ODF provides significant services to small forest owners.

The CFF would now like to go to bat for another program of importance for the Oregon landscape and to small forest landowners: Oregon State University Forestry and Natural Resources Extension.

Extension provides the first point of contact for many forest landowners. Through the Basic Forestry Short Course, Extension introduces landowners to the idea that sound management practices lead to a healthy, diverse, and economically productive forest. Following a recent Short Course in Amity, Yamhill County, a participant told the group that the fee for the course was the best $50 he’d ever spent.

Extension’s Master Woodland Manager program introduces small forest owners to world-class experts and cutting-edge research. Part of the "price" of the MWM program is a promise by participants to reach out to other forest owners. One outreach project, the award-winning Ties to the Land program, produced a succession planning toolkit that is now national in scope, helping families keep their lands in forest ownership.

Another national program, Women Owning Woodlands Network (WOWnet), also began as an Oregon Forestry Extension program. WOWnet offers a wide variety of free forestry-related, volunteer-led programs to women (and men) across the state, many staged on small forests.

Family forestlands benefit most from Extension services because most small forest landowners lack the resources to hire full-time or on-call foresters and consultants. At present, however, funding for Extension is tenuous. The funding structure is a multi-legged stool that includes the state through OSU, federal funding, forest owners through program fees, and, significantly, individual counties. Because many counties are financially strapped, especially in southwestern
Oregon, this funding structure is now at risk. Several counties have opted out in recent years, depriving family forestland owners of inexpensive and ready access to quality assistance.

According to Oregon Forest Resources Institute in Oregon there are 4,668,000 acres of forestland belonging to landowners who own less than 5000 acres. As CFF has stressed in previous testimony, most family forests are located in "gateway" areas, at the ever-stressed urban and suburban fringes and the edges of deep forest. Access to Extension's wide range of knowledge and training programs make achievement of the benefits of healthy forests more available to both these landowners and the public at large.

We urge you to keep in mind the utility of Extension Forestry and Natural Resources programs to family forestland owners when the question of state funding comes before you.

Sincerely,

Committee for Family Forestlands

Craig Shinn, Chair    Susan Watkins, Vice-Chair

cc: Oregon Board of Forestry Members
    Doug Decker, State Forester

Sen. Chris Edwards, Co-Chair
Rep. Ben Unger, Co-Chair
Sen. Jackie Dingfelder
Sen. Chuck Thomsen
Rep. Bruce Hanna
Jim Johnson, OSU

The Committee for Family Forestlands is a statutory committee appointed by the Board of Forestry to provide advice and recommendations regarding family forests and includes family forestland owners from different areas of the state, environmental organization and forest industry representatives, a citizen-at-large and ex-officio members representing the Oregon Department of Forestry (ODF), Extension Service, Oregon Forest Resources Institute, small landowner associations, the US Forest Service, and logging/forestry consulting interests.