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Peter Harkema
Oregon Consensus
Portland State University
Portland Oregon

Dear Peter:

Please forward this letter to members of the DSL Advisory Committee as you feel appropriate.

Attached is a draft summary that reflects the work of the College of Forestry to date to develop and articulate preliminary experimental treatment plans for an Elliott State Research Forest. We deliver this draft with the intention it serves as a starting point for a discussion of how to establish experimental units across watersheds on the Elliott that include mature forest stands. As I prepare to enter this ongoing dialogue, I feel it is essential to first establish the “why” behind the need for a research forest before moving onto the “how” of implementing such an effort.

If there is one thing that we have learned over the last two months of COVID-19, it is the importance of science in decision making and in creating a well-informed and responsive society. Without science and experimentation, there is only anecdotal evidence, individual experience, and conjecture. Forestry decisions made in a scientific vacuum, while not likely fatal, are devastating because the consequences of routine forest management decisions can reverberate for centuries.

Forestry and natural resource sciences are dependent on science and scientific underpinnings if they are to be sustainable and effective. Thus, the underlying logic behind the conveyance of an 82,000-acre state forest for research purposes hinges on the fact science must inform land management and resource utilization to achieve a more sustainable future. A sustainable future means one in which we meet human fiber needs without degrading the environment and, as such, seek to integrate timber management for forest products with corresponding demands for biodiversity, protection of threatened and endangered species, recreational activities, and rural well-being. The establishment of such a research forest is more important now than ever given our rapidly changing climate and the imperative created by human-induced extirpation of species. For me, this experimental forest represents an opportunity to conduct science that will help move forest land management into a new era wherein sustainability and systems-based thinking are a driving motivation behind decision making in land management.

It is my understanding that the stakeholder advisory group generally recognizes the importance of science and the establishment of a research forest; however, a significant barrier to reaching an agreement on the proposed TRIAD design has to do with conducting “extensive” forest experimental trials in 80-160 yr old stands. This is an entirely

understandable concern as there is no set definition of “extensive management,” thereby leaving stakeholders to guess or predict what type of impact “extensive” treatments might have on the structure, composition and function of mature forests in the Elliott.

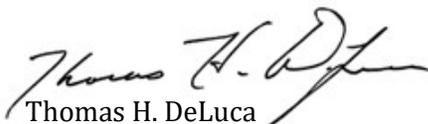
The attached document represents a thoughtful attempt to help define the objectives of all treatments within the research platform, “reserve,” “intensive,” and “extensive” harvest treatments and what types of research prescriptions might be used to achieve those objectives. Perhaps most notable are the ecological, ethical and practical principals upon which our vision of “extensive” rests. If it is understood the driving force behind experimental treatments is to meet numerous values and objectives, then others might be more likely to interpret the approach to such experiments without bias or inherent concern. It is also worth mentioning that we have explicitly included the unique research challenges and opportunities afforded by the riparian areas and roads that populate the various research watersheds. This document does not address implementation or governance plans which will be covered in a separate document once there general agreement on the proposed research platform.

Finally, I would like us all to consider weighing short and long-term gains. It might be appealing to hedge bets and seek to set the Elliott aside as a carbon and biodiversity reserve. The short-term appeal of such an approach is to place over 82,000 acres of forest of varied prior disturbance into protection. If we pursue Oregon State University’s proposed path, we will put more than half of the forest into reserves. The management of these reserves will be to exclusively support conservation-oriented research. The remainder of the forest will support research that seeks to fully integrate timber management with the concurrent objectives of biodiversity, recreation, aesthetics, habitat, rural well-being, sustainable green infrastructure, and water quality (to name a few). By pursuing this path, achieved research outcomes could likely result in large-scale changes to forestry practices in coastal Oregon well into the future. These changes could lead to a vast increase in species protection and even recovery as well as a more sustainable approach to forestry and the delivery of forest products. I believe in this future for the Elliott, and the value of these outcomes.

We seek to reestablish forestry as a leader in conservation. We aim to pursue approaches to forestry that are sustainable and that integrate numerous values into a single fully functioning system. We have lofty dreams, but they are dreams we can only accomplish through large-scale experimentation and demonstration. The Elliott provides a near-ideal venue for achieving these objectives.

Thanks for considering these thoughts, and I look forward to working with all those interested in establishing an Elliott State Research Forest.

Sincerely,



Thomas H. DeLuca
Cheryl Ramberg-Ford and Allyn C. Ford Dean