



July 23, 2014

For immediate release 14-15

More information: Julie Curtis – 503-986-5298; julie.curtis@state.or.us

State launches alternatives analysis for Elliott State Forest

Project includes outreach to interest groups, work with technical advisers

Salem – As directed by the State Land Board, a project team is working to gather information and examine alternative ownership and management scenarios for the Elliott State Forest.

Most of the 93,000-acre forest, located in Coos and Douglas counties, is overseen by the Land Board. The forest is managed for the Board by the Oregon Department of Forestry. About 84,000 acres is a land asset of the Common School Fund, a trust fund established at the time of statehood to help pay for public education in Oregon.

The fund has disbursed more than \$240 million to Oregon schools over the past five years. However, reduced timber harvests on the Elliott due to litigation over species protections resulted in a net deficit of about \$3 million in operating costs for fiscal year 2013. The negative returns conflict with the Land Board's fiduciary obligations to the Common School Fund.

The Land Board is composed of Governor John Kitzhaber (chair), State Treasurer Ted Wheeler, and Secretary of State Kate Brown. As trustees of the \$1.4 billion fund, the Board must look at sustainable, long-term management of the fund's land assets, said Department of State Lands Director Mary Abrams. "We're seeking creative ideas from a wide variety of interest groups. We know how passionately many Oregonians feel about this forest, and we need new thinking about its future," she said.

The Elliott alternatives analysis team will be working with a number of interest groups, including the education beneficiaries of the fund; local officials and economic development groups in the area; conservation organizations and land trusts; and private timber interests.

The first round of stakeholder work sessions is being conducted during July in Salem, Portland and the Coos Bay area. A second round of sessions will be held in September.

Public comments are being accepted now via email or in writing, and additional opportunities will be offered at public meetings in the fall. More information about the project, meeting notes, contacts and the timeline is on the State Lands website: www.oregonstatelands.us.

The Elliott alternatives project is being led by John Potter and Stephanie Hallock Cummins, who both have years of experience in natural resource management and state government. Analysis and technical

assistance is being provided by Eugene-based consulting firm Evergreen Economics and an interagency workgroup composed of state and federal agency representatives.

Using public input, research and modeling prepared by the technical consultant, and expertise provided by the interagency workgroup, the project team expects to draft recommendations in November for the Land Board's consideration at their Dec. 9 public meeting.

"Based on all the good ideas we're receiving from stakeholders, it's highly possible we'll offer a few solid alternatives to the Board, and they'll require further refinement on one or more of the options presented," said Abrams. "This is not something we're taking lightly. The Elliott has been an asset of the Common School Fund since the 1930s. It's always been important for school funding, but also for its conservation and recreation values. We need to do this right."

Additional information:

Elliott State Forest: <http://www.oregon.gov/dsl/LW/Pages/Elliott-State-Forest.aspx>

Common School Fund: <http://www.oregon.gov/dsl/DO/Pages/aboutcsf.aspx>

State Land Board: <http://www.oregon.gov/DSL/SLB/Pages/index.aspx>

The State Land Board consists of Governor John Kitzhaber, Secretary of State Kate Brown and State Treasurer Ted Wheeler. The Department of State Lands administers diverse natural and fiscal resources. Many of the resources generate revenue for the Common School Fund, such as state-owned rangelands and timberlands, waterway leases, estates for which no will or heirs exist, and unclaimed property. Twice a year, the agency distributes fund investment earnings to support K-12 public schools. The agency also administers Oregon's Removal-Fill Law, which requires people removing or filling certain amounts of material in waters of the state to obtain a permit.

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