

Board of Forestry Rural Community

Testimony of David Kunert, Division Forester

November 7, 2018

I am David Kunert, a Division Forester with Hampton Lumber. I have spent the last twenty-five years of my career working in the Tillamook and Clatsop State Forests. I'm grateful to be able to raise a family in Tillamook County and proud of the contributions my line of work has made to the resilience of our local economy and to the quality of life in our community. We value the water quality, habitat values, and recreational opportunities the county's public and private forests provide for residents and visitors alike.

In addition to my work with Hampton Lumber, I volunteer with our high school's Future Natural Resources Leaders program. It has been incredibly rewarding to see young people recognize the unique relationship we have with our working forests and to hear their excitement about a future career in the woods. I am also co-chair of the Tillamook Working Lands & Waters Cooperative, a group of individuals who make a living in farming, fishing, and forestry in the county. We aim to raise awareness of the importance of these sectors, the needs and challenges associated with them, and the pride we take in our stewardship responsibilities. I hope you share in that pride; for as a Board tasked with oversight of forest management in the state, you play an important role in ensuring our community and our natural resources industries are successful long-term.

Part of my job at Hampton is to purchase logs for our sawmills in Warrenton and Tillamook. These mills provide over 300 people with year-round, family-wage jobs. I cannot overstate the importance of timber harvest on the Clatsop and Tillamook state forests to our mills and our community.

Our communities on the north coast are not based on high tech or service industries, nor will they ever be. Our niche is in natural resources as well as food and wood products manufacturing. Seasonal tourism, while a welcome addition, does not provide the stability and income levels needed to sustain a healthy, vibrant coastal community in Oregon.

In Tillamook County, the average forest sector job pays roughly \$60,000 a year. The average wage county-wide is half that. As you can imagine, when mills close or struggle, it ripples through the rest of the coastal economy. As an example, in the mid-1980's, the Publishers Paper sawmill in Tillamook curtailed operations due to reduced timber supply. After three months local coffee shops, tire stores, and diesel repair shops all felt the pinch. As time went on, social services were strained due to declining revenues. It is well-understood that economic hardship is a major catalyst for income inequality, crime, and drug use in urban areas. Our community is no different. We need good, steady jobs to keep the social fabric of our communities intact. That's what state forests provide for Oregon's coastal counties.

I have witnessed the growth potential of the Northwest State Forest first hand and I have to say that I find it sad and frustrating that in a state that enjoys such an abundance of renewable natural resource wealth, we continue to struggle to meet citizens' needs in terms of adequate funding for public safety, education, and other programs. It is our privilege and our responsibility to manage these forests in a

way that provides sustainable benefits for all. The thought of policy choices or negotiation giving away the economic benefits provided by the State Forest to my community definitely keeps me up at nights.

60 percent of forestland in Oregon is federally owned, the vast majority of which is reserved for habitat and recreational values. At less than four percent, state forests represent a relatively small portion of Oregon's total forestland. That four percent, however, is a large and critical part of the success of local wood manufacturing sector that requires a reliable supply of state forest timber to maintain essential infrastructure and employment.

The Tillamook and Clatsop state forests were deeded to the State for the purpose of managing them on behalf of the counties. As far as I'm aware that relationship has never changed. There is no question that we can sustainably increase harvest levels and simultaneously enhance conservation outcomes. In so doing, we can realize the "greatest permanent value" mandated by statute.

To that end, I remain optimistic that we can find a sustainable solution that would keep Tillamook and other rural communities healthy for years to come. Thank you for the opportunity to testify.