

The Timber Industry of Today

Part 4: The State of Our State Forests *continued from page 7*

relet, a protected seabird, which has led to reductions in logging in the forest and a drop in timber harvest revenues. The sale of the properties was meant to help correct the budget shortfall caused by the reductions.

“Those who appreciate clean water, stately forests and access to our public lands are the big winners today,” said Josh Laughlin, executive director of the environmentally friendly group Cascadia Wildlands when the Seneca Jones sale was overturned. “Privatizing public land would have been a disaster for imperiled salmon and wildlife that rely on clean water and old forests to survive.”

Industry and Coos County representatives saw the decision as a loss for local school funding, which timber harvests help fund. “The Elliott State Forest was set up to be managed sustainably and provide critical funding for the Oregon common school fund in perpetuity,” said Todd A. Payne, Seneca Jones chief executive officer. “This was done with tremendous thought and wisdom. The Elliott has gone from a revenue generating asset worth hundreds of millions of dollars to a liability for the state.”

“It’s an unfortunate decision for the schools,” added Coos County Commissioner John Sweet. “Education is the real loser.”

Currently the DSL and Oregon State University are exploring the possibility of converting the Elliott into a State Research Forest.

Controlling the Narrative

As the Elliott State Forest issue exemplifies, the public is flooded with mixed messages about the timber industry and how it impacts our environment. As we noted in Part 3 of this series, timber money plays a big part in Oregon politics – the timber industry gives more money to Oregon politicians than they do in any other state. Political lobbyists on both sides in the “timber wars” are active in Salem, while also working to influence public opinion. The timber industry tells us they create jobs while practicing sustainable logging. Environmental groups tell us our drinking water and air are being poisoned while wildlife habitat is being destroyed. Meanwhile a newly formed statewide organization, Timber Unity, which is perceived as being grassroots and centered right here in Vernonia, has added to the discord. Who can we believe and trust?

The timber industry has a lot invested in Oregon. With so much money on the line we need reliable sources of information. In recent years journalists and news organizations’ ability to tell a balanced story has become suspect. Yet the *Oregonian* newspaper, with investigative journalist Rob Davis, together with OPB’s Tony Schick, have been providing detailed reporting on timber industry practices, big money’s influence in Oregon politics, and industrial logging’s impact on small communities. They’ve been a credible source of research and information on a subject that

has needed some balanced exposure.

As citizens we would also like to hope we would receive legitimate information from our government agencies since they work for us, using our tax dollars.

Unfortunately, that is not always the case in regards to our forests. In August of this year, the *Oregonian*’s Davis and OPB’s Schick published a disturbing report on the Oregon Forest Resource Institute (OFRI), a public agency provided with a \$4 million annual budget from timber tax funds, and tasked with educating the public about forest issues and products while encouraging landowners to use sound forestry practices.

While OFRI does provide some useful information – I’ve quoted statistics from their sources numerous times in this series of articles – the agency has become more of a public-relations arm for the timber industry. Following Davis and Schick’s article Governor Brown ordered an audit into “ethical concerns” at the agency.

At the center of the controversy are reports that staff at OFRI, which is prohibited by law from working to influence governmental policy, used advertising dollars to promote Oregon’s “strong logging laws” which in reality are weaker than both Washington and California’s; tried to interfere with the release of peer reviewed research from Oregon State University; and helped stop a research project at the University of Oregon that reflected poorly on the timber

industry. The investigation showed that staff regularly participated in timber industry legislative strategy meetings, helped plan a timber industry lobbying day in Salem, and notified industry representatives of pending research they thought was damaging and then helped craft industry responses.

OFRI is overseen by a 13-person Board of Directors. The board’s 11 voting members are directly connected to the timber industry and include nine representatives of timber producing companies, with members from Weyerhaeuser Co., Hampton Lumber, Hancock Forest Management, WyEast Timber, and Seneca Jones Timber; one member representing small woodland owners; and one AFL-CIO representative for forest industry employees. The two non-voting representatives currently include the Dean of Oregon State University, and a member of the Oregon State University Extension Service who holds the only designated public seat on the Board. A Deputy State Forester serves as a liaison to the Board. As reported by Davis and Schick, the public position had been held by Chris Edwards, a former state senator who resigned from the Board in January 2019 and became a lobbyist for the timber industry.

In June of this year OFRI released a 321-page draft report produced by Oregon State University, which found Oregon’s forest practices laws do not adequately protect some aspects of water quality, and recommended chang-

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VERNONIA LOGGER STADIUM CAMPAIGN

The Vernonia Logger Stadium Steering Committee, a group of alumni and community volunteers, are working to secure the resources to construct a covered stadium with capacity for 900 fans, concession stand, and restrooms at the sports field complex to serve the students and community while rooting on their Loggers.

You can help make Vernonia Logger Stadium complete by sending your tax-deductible cash contribution, or making an in-kind, tax-deductible donation of materials or services.

Let’s Go, Loggers!

Imagine this...



HERE!

Vernonia Logger Stadium Steering Committee

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| Jim Eckland Co-Chair | Kelly Jarman |
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| Kathy Eckland | Teresa Williams |
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Yes, we can help build Vernonia Logger Stadium!

☐ \$25 ☐ \$50 ☐ \$100 ☐ \$250 ☐ \$500 ☐ \$1,000 ☐ Other \$

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**Make checks payable to: Vernonia Athletic Dept.
Mail to: Vernonia Logger Stadium, PO Box 73, Vernonia, OR 97064**