



Courtesy Oregon Department of Forestry

State Treasurer Tobias Read said Tuesday that he sees a “path forward” for public ownership of about 82,500 acres of the Elliott Forest in Coos and Douglas counties.

Read signals intent to pursue public ownership option for Elliott Forest

State treasurer could side with Gov. Brown

By CLAIRES WITHYCOMBE
Capital Bureau

SALEM — After a sustained outcry from environmental groups, state Treasurer Tobias Read appeared to signal his intent Tuesday to side with the governor in her evolving plan to stop the impending sale of an expanse of coastal forest in southern Oregon.

Read said Tuesday that he sees a “path forward” for public ownership of about 82,500 acres of the Elliott Forest in Coos and Douglas counties.

Last month, though, the treasurer voiced qualified support for a proposal to sell the forest to a partnership between a Roseburg timber company and a Native American tribe.

Read announced Tuesday that he would work with the Department of State Lands to develop a plan for the forest that would end its obligation to generate revenue for the Common School Fund, which is essentially an endowment for K-12 education.

In 2015, the State Land Board — then comprised of Gov. Kate Brown, then-Treasurer Ted Wheeler and then-Secretary of State Jeanne Atkins — decided to sell the land after litigation challenged the state’s management of areas occupied by protected species. The state said lawsuits prevented it from harvesting enough timber to generate money for the fund.

But a year later, only one entity — the partnership between Lone Rock Resources, a Roseburg timber company, and the Cow Creek Band of Umpqua Tribe of Indians — had submitted an acquisition proposal, which drew fire from the state’s environmental groups. And Brown has said she no longer wants to sell the forest.

Environmental activists have been lobbying the board for months, and of late have focused on Read.

They warn that the sale of the Elliott to a private company would realize fears that under the administration of President Donald Trump, states will follow the president’s lead and privatize public land.

In a statement Tuesday, Brown alluded to those concerns, saying public ownership was “critical” to sustainable timber harvests and protecting the environment for future generations.

“I remain committed to



exploring a path toward public ownership of the Elliott that continues to honor the Common School Fund,” Brown said. “I am heartened that Treasurer Read shares this vision and I appreciate his unwavering commitment to the state’s fiduciary responsibility to Oregon schools.”

Brown has proposed using the state’s bonding capacity to buy a portion of the forest. Read said Tuesday that the governor had worked to drum up support for that strategy.

“I have made it clear to all sides that if Gov. Brown brought forward a viable alternative I would consider it,” Read said. “The governor and her team have continued to refine her framework, and most importantly she has worked to build support for key bonding components among legislators, including the Senate president.”

State Senate President Peter Courtney, D-Salem, has suggested using revenue bonds payable from revenues generated by the forest — whether through timber harvests or other activities.

The lone Republican on the land board, Secretary of State Dennis Richardson, voted in favor of moving forward with the sale in February. His office did not immediately respond Tuesday to a request for comment on Treasurer Read’s announcement.

On Sunday, the Democratic Party of Oregon passed a resolution that urged the state Land Board to work with the governor on the public ownership option.

The move puts newly elected party chairwoman Jeanne Atkins in the position of advocating against a concept she signed off on when she was secretary of state and member of the Land Board in 2015. Read, who was elected treasurer in November, is a Democrat, as is Brown.

The Land Board meets again May 9 in Salem, until then the Department of State Lands is both preparing a sale agreement and a report on public ownership options.

State House passes bill providing increased penalties for unequal pay

By PARIS ACHEN
Capital Bureau

SALEM — The state House of Representatives has passed a bill that increases potential civil penalties for paying women and minorities less than their counterparts who perform the same job.

While the state has laws barring discrimination, the wage gap between white men and women and minorities still persists, said state Rep. Ann Lininger, D-Lake Oswego, the bill’s chief sponsor.

“One of the things we need to do to make sure that people are not discriminated against based on pay is to strengthen the penalties for discrimination,” Lininger said.

Lawmakers voted 36-24 to pass the bill Tuesday after debating for two hours on the House floor. The legislation now proceeds to the Senate for consideration.

The bill makes exceptions for higher pay in certain circumstances, such as when an employee has seniority or produces demonstrably higher quality or quantity of work product.

The legislation bars employers from screening job

applicants based on their salary history or to seek salary history from candidates. The proposal also spells out that an employee who has been discriminated against as a member of a protected class has a right to a jury trial and actual, compensatory and punitive damages.

Substitute rejected

Before passing the measure, legislators first considered a substitute bill offered on the floor by House Minority Leader Rep. Mike McLane, R-Powell Butte. The GOP-spearheaded minority report would have removed punitive penalties, provided a self-evaluation defense and would have made veterans one of the protected classes in the bill. Republicans won support from some Democrats, including Reps. Brian Clem of Salem and Deborah Boone of Cannon Beach.

The self-evaluation defense would have encouraged more compliance with the law and spurred fewer lawsuits, McLane said.

“Do you want lawsuits, or do you want compliance? Because you are going to choose today,” he said.

The concept was that busi-

nesses that had made a good faith effort to address pay disparities by conducting an evaluation of salaries could use that as a defense if sued by an employee.

But Lininger and other lawmakers asserted the substitute bill would actually roll back protections that already exist in the law for those who are discriminated against, including for gender, disability or sexual orientation.

“It actually weakens penalties for those employers who have discriminated if they demonstrate that they have done a self-evaluation that satisfies this affirmative defense test,” Lininger said.

She said she would encourage the Senate to consider adding veterans as a protected class in the bill.

Rep. Julie Parrish, R-West Linn, voted against Lininger’s bill and for the substitute bill because she said both would likely hurt the state’s budget.

“The fact is for us to send this bill out and say no fiscal

impact is a lie,” Parrish said.

Egregious offenders

A report in 2014 by The Statesman Journal showed Oregon state government is one of the most egregious offenders of pay equity, even in state offices led by Democrats, Parrish noted.

“I would like to have that discussion, but we are sitting here in a \$1.8 billion shortfall, and we’re proposing to put forth legislation that will directly impact state and local governments in a time when we don’t have dollars,” she said.

One lawsuit with punitive damages could wipe out the budget of a small school district, Parrish said.

“Again, I’m not saying the conversation isn’t important. As a woman and as an Arab woman, I have been paid less,” she said.

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A: Absolutely! In 2016, I did some coin-related business every three days. Some days were spent selling Silver Bullion, other days buying collections, and yet others doing estate evaluations for attorneys.

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Q: Does The Daily Astorian have a Seaside office?

A: Yes it does, located at 1555 N. Roosevelt Dr. on Highway 101, between Stop ‘N Go and the Human Bean. Office hours are 8-5 p.m. Monday-Friday. We are here to help with any of your Daily Astorian, Coast Weekend, and Chinook Observer, Seaside Signal, Cannon Beach Gazette and Coast River Business Journal needs.

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