

The Bulletin (www.bendbulletin.com)

Published June 16, 2017 at 12:08AM

Editorial: Millions of dollars for Elliott, but none for the children



Joe Metzler walks across a fallen log in Elliott State Forest near Reedsport in October 2016. (Amanda Loman/The World via AP, File)

Federal and state government own more than 60 percent of the land in Oregon, but still no price is too high for those who believe the Elliott State Forest must stay in government hands.

The Elliott's 82,500 acres are constitutionally required to be managed to raise funds for the Common School Fund to help pay for K-12 education.

But restrictions on logging have turned the money-maker into a money-spender in recent years. A plan to sell the forest to gain some benefit for schools collapsed after the environmental lobby went to work on the State Land Board.

The latest numbers are shocking:

- \$220.8 million forgone from the canceled sale.
- \$3.5 million spent preparing for that sale.
- \$5.7 million to manage the land and plan for its future.
- \$100 million of the state's bonding capacity to "buy" the forest from the Common School Fund.
- Untold legal costs.
- Risks from possible lawsuits by those who tried to buy the land and by those who represent the schools that should have benefited from its management.

Another impressive number: The state wants to pay a private company to manage the forest for the next two years because that will cost only \$1.6 million instead of twice that much if the state does it itself.

And that plan for the future? It requires the state to hire 13 people, according to a report in The Portland Tribune, including a silviculturist, technical writer, policy analyst and part-time administrative specialist.

Too high a price? Not for Cascadia Wildlands' Josh Laughlin, as quoted by the Tribune: "... you can't really put a price tag on a lifetime of clean water, salmon and wildlife habitat and recreation."

As if there is no other place in Oregon where there is clean water, salmon and wildlife habitat and recreation.

As if the children for whose education the Elliott was reserved don't count in the equation.