

Land board votes to sell Elliott State Forest, but decision not final

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All three members received campaign contributions from timber company seeking to buy forest



(Photo: Oregon Department of Forestry)

This story, originally published Feb. 14, has been updated.

The Oregon State Land Board changed gears again and voted to sell the Elliott State Forest to a Roseburg timber company on Tuesday, but the decision isn't quite final.

The board voted 2-1 to proceed with the sale to a partnership of Lone Rock Timber Company and the Cow Creek Band of Umpqua Tribe of Indians.

In a vote that surprised many interested parties, Oregon State Treasurer Tobias Read, a Democrat, voted with Secretary of State Dennis Richardson, a Republican, to move forward with the sale. Oregon Gov. Kate Brown opposed. Two months ago, board members voiced opposition to the sale, but two of those members have changed since then — Richardson succeeded Jeanne Atkins as Secretary of State; and Read succeeded Ted Wheeler as Treasurer.

However, the sale of the 82,500-acre forest near Coos Bay won't be finalized until a meeting on May 9. Brown directed the state land board to come up with an option to keep forest publicly owned.

Richardson tried to scuttle that idea, making a motion during the meeting "to override the direction you just gave to the director because it's contrary to the (sale) motion the land board just passed."

"It is not contrary to the land board motion that just passed," Brown replied in a packed room.

Richardson insisted on making the motion to override Brown's order, but Read, a Democrat, stayed silent. With the motion having failed, Brown concluded the meeting with a bang of the gavel.

[Letter accuses Oregon environmental groups of 'white privilege' on Elliott forest sale \(http://www.statesmanjournal.com/story/news/2017/02/14/letter-accuses-oregon-environmental-groups-white-privilege-elliott-forest-sale/97903878/\)](http://www.statesmanjournal.com/story/news/2017/02/14/letter-accuses-oregon-environmental-groups-white-privilege-elliott-forest-sale/97903878/)

Environmental groups denounced Tuesday's decision.

"At the end of the day, this privatization of the Elliott will result in more clear-cuts, more muddy streams and it shortchanges every Oregonian's future," said Josh Laughlin with Cascadia Wildlands.

Read, a Democrat, defended his decision in a statement issued after the meeting.

"The decision ... to move forward with the sale of the Elliott was not easy," Read said in a statement. "For far too long we have struggled to adequately fund our schools and give our children the world class education they deserve."

Richardson said it would be unethical to say no after the proposal was formulated and the bid made, at cost to the state government and to the bidder.

"You keep your promise, and it's up to the state to do that," Richardson said.

Brown wants a bond proposal developed to include up to \$100 million in state bonding capacity to protect high-value habitat, including old-growth stands. Under her plan, a portion of the forest would be decoupled from the Common School Fund trust lands that fund Oregon schools. The harvesting of timber would be allowed while protecting endangered and threatened species.

The forest was created in 1930 to provide funding for the Common School Fund, but recently has lost money as timber harvests have declined.

In August 2015, Oregon's State Land Board voted to sell the property as one piece to a single party. It set a sale price of \$220 million; Lone Rock submitted the only bid.

Lone Rock said it would keep public access to at least 41,250 acres in the Elliott, although that could involve a permit and fee system.

"Our company has worked in and around the Elliott State Forest for 50 years," Toby Luther, the company's CEO, said in an [earlier statement](#) ([/story/news/2016/11/16/roseburg-company-sole-bidder-elliott-state-forest/93933050/](#)). "We feel that purchasing the forest is the best way to guarantee its proper management for both our community and the entire state."

[Roseburg company is sole bidder for Elliott State Forest](#)

(<http://www.statesmanjournal.com/story/news/2016/11/16/roseburg-company-sole-bidder-elliott-state-forest/93933050/>)

Read added what he called "conservation enhancements" to the deal. One stipulation would allow the state to "repurchase up to \$25 million worth of acreage that provides key conservation habitat, allowing for continued recreational, hunting, and angling access." He suggested that land should be turned into a state park.

All three members of the land board got campaign contributions from the groups seeking to purchase the forest, according to the Secretary of State's website. Read received \$3,000 from [Lone Rock](#) (<https://secure.sos.state.or.us/orestar/gotoPublicTransactionDetail.do?tranRsn=2292897>) and its CEO [Luther](#) (<https://secure.sos.state.or.us/orestar/gotoPublicTransactionDetail.do?tranRsn=2292889>), while Richardson got \$10,000 from [Cow Creek Band of Umpqua Tribe](#) (<https://secure.sos.state.or.us/orestar/gotoPublicTransactionDetail.do?tranRsn=2468171>) and \$11,000 from Lone Rock. Brown received \$5,000, the Oregonian reported.

Associated Press contributed to this story

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[Gov. Brown proposes new direction for Elliott State Forest](#)

(<http://www.statesmanjournal.com/story/news/2017/02/10/gov-brown-proposes-new-direction-elliott-state-forest/97766842/>)

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