



KeepTheChildrensForest.Org  
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January 10, 2021

Addressed to:

F. King Alexander, OSU President, [pres.office@oregonstate.edu](mailto:pres.office@oregonstate.edu)  
Thomas DeLuca, Dean, OSU College of Forestry, [tom.deluca@oregonstate.edu](mailto:tom.deluca@oregonstate.edu)

Dear President Alexander and Dean DeLuca:

We, the undersigned, would like to meet with both of you, together if possible, to discuss our common issues about OSU's involvement in the [OSU Elliott State Research Forest Plan](#). We want to share our concerns and work together to promote collaborative decision making with the rest of Oregon. It certainly would help us know what OSU thinks of these issues and how our committee can move forward with securing the highest value for the Common School Fund.

Here are our key areas of concern along with a representative question from each area. A more extensive discussion of each area can be found in the appendix:

**To President Alexander:**

- 1. Maintaining Trust:** Was it ethical for the \$840,000 paid to OSU for Elliott planning purposes to be charged to the Common School Fund?
- 2. Establishing Fair Market Value:** We believe the \$220.8 million evaluation of the Elliott from 2016 is much lower than its probable \$1 billion value today. If OSU purchases the Elliott, will the Common School Fund be fully compensated?
- 3. Effective Governance:** If the Department of State Lands and the Oregon Department of Forestry were incapable of managing the Elliott, why is OSU any better qualified to do so?
- 4. Collaborative Decision Making:** The large majority of Oregonians were excluded from the "public input process" during development of the [OSU Plan](#). Moving forward, how can we work together to include voices from educators, students, rural populations and experienced forest managers?
- 5. Being a Land Grant University:** OSU is a Land Grant University. It is charged with conducting research that has practical value and usefulness to Oregon taxpayers and landowners. How does the current OSU proposal meet that standard?

**To Dean DeLuca:**

6. **Forestry Basics:** Why weren't standard cruise and inventory data included in the [OSU Plan](#)?
7. **Catastrophic Fires:** The long-term history of the Elliott is one of repeated catastrophic fires. Without active forest management, as OSU proposes, won't the next catastrophe be worse?
8. **Forest Values:** The [OSU Plan](#) speculates about selling carbon credits. Should a scientific assessment of monetizing social values also consider spotted owls, marbled murrelets, lamprey, coho, and local jobs for comparative purposes?
9. **Active Forest Management:** What is the purpose of creating a de facto Wilderness with two-thirds of the Elliott? If this forest type is needed for research purposes, why not utilize the hundreds of thousands of similar acres available for study in the nearby Siuslaw National Forest?
10. **Useful research:** How can private landowners, industrial foresters, and other experienced professionals be included in OSU forest research proposals?

Thank you for considering this request and our concerns. The following people are co-authors and co-signers of this letter and appendix:

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As an initial distribution list, copies of this letter are being sent to:

OSU Leadership Team	OSU Board of Directors
OSU Faculty Senators	OSU College of Forestry faculty and staff
Oregon Consensus faculty and staff	Oregon State Land Board
Oregon School Boards Association	All Oregon K-12 School District Superintendents
All Oregon K-12 School Principals	All Oregon K-12 School Board Members
Elliott State Research Forest Advisory Committee	Department of State Lands
Elliott State Research Forest Science Advisory Panel	

## **APPENDIX**

### **Questions for OSU about its OSU Elliott State Research Forest Plan**

#### **Background Ideas**

This letter and appendix were written by an informal steering committee representing a number of non-profit organizations and concerned citizens. More information [About Us](#) can be found at our [KeepTheChildrensForest.Org](#) website.

The Elliott State Forest is Oregon's first state forest and was created specifically for Oregon's K-12 children in 1930, but the Elliott's heritage goes back further. The Elliott was created by swapping scattered parcels of School Trust Lands with a consolidated block of federal land so the new state forest could be managed efficiently. Oregon's School Trust Lands were granted and accepted as a condition of statehood in 1859, and Oregon's Constitution requires School Trust Lands, such as the Elliott State Forest, to be managed for the benefit of the Common School Fund. These lands were intended to provide a permanent endowment for future generations of Oregon's schoolchildren.

For many decades, this arrangement worked well and logging from the Elliott State Forest generated more than \$700 million dollars for Oregon schools along with hundreds of good paying jobs for rural Oregon workers.

But in recent years, the State Land Board has not behaved as honorable Trustees: beginning with a 2012 legal decision, they have shut down all active forestry operations on the Elliott, removed the Oregon Department of Forestry as the forest's managers, halted all timber sales and have no plans for future timber sales. As a result, this formerly productive tree farm has been losing money each year.

This deliberate squandering of Common School Funds comes from an apparent political desire to avoid logging and "sequester carbon" instead. While this is popular among urban environmentalists, it has robbed Oregon's school children of an important source of revenue for local school districts. A similar court case involving the "Oregon Forest Trust Lands" was decided in November 2019 when a Linn County jury gave Oregon counties a \$1.1 billion dollar award because Oregon had breached its contract with 13 rural counties by failing to maximize logging revenues on state land.

The State Land Board has spent the last two years planning to sell the Elliott State Forest to the OSU College of Forestry. In its December 8, 2020 meeting, the State Land Board announced it will spend the next two years planning for this impending change. It appears the State Land Board wants a never-ending planning process that makes environmentalists happy, but leaves the Common School Fund and rural communities in permanent decline.

By all appearances the Elliott Forest's current management direction has been dictated by a small number of anti-logging organizations, their legal representatives, and political supporters in urban northwest Oregon. These are the people that have attended public meetings, generated written support, and constituted the "advisory councils" that have resulted in the current proposal and decisions by the State Land Board.

In contrast, there has been insufficient representation in these meetings by rural Oregonians, affected schools and school districts, local experts, or experienced forest managers and knowledgeable scientific dissent. Similarly, the timber industry has been notably absent from the discussion: we suspect they rightly fear retribution from the environmental and regulatory communities if they speak out forcefully. Overall, from our perspective, this has not been a transparent or inclusive process by any measure, and the current proposal – if adopted – will become a predictable failure and public embarrassment.

OSU's role in this process remains undecided. OSU has a stated commitment to collaborative decision-making:

The leadership of Oregon State University is committed to making and implementing decisions through collaboration, shared governance, transparency, accountability and effective communication. (from <https://leadership.oregonstate.edu/>)

Also, recent major political and personnel changes at OSU suggest things may be in flux. OSU has a new president, and the College of Forestry has a new dean. Geoff Huntington, the University of Oregon environmental lawyer who helped initiate and, until recently, led the OSU Elliott Research Proposal inside the College of Forestry, has moved from OSU to the Department of State Lands (DSL). Also, the [OSU Plan](#) suggests it still needs to be approved by each of you and by OSU's Board of Directors.

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## Questions for F. King Alexander, OSU President

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### Topic #1: Maintaining Trust

President Alexander, please read through the case study in the [Broken Trust](#) page of the [KeepTheChildrensForest.Org](#) website. It describes in simple terms why we believe it is unethical for OSU to take \$840,000 from DSL to create an "Elliott State Research Forest" plan – yet this money has already been taken and spent by OSU.

- Was this an inadvertent ethical oversight? If so, will OSU return this money to the Common School Fund?
- Alternatively, if OSU intends to keep this money, why does OSU feel it isn't a breach of fiduciary trust for DSL to pay OSU \$840,000 to create a proposal to convert the Elliott State Forest from productive timberland into an OSU research forest and "reserve"?

### Topic #2: Establishing Fair Market Value

The [Market Value & "Decoupling"](#) page of the [KeepTheChildrensForest.Org](#) website provides strong evidence the Elliott State Forest's fair market value likely exceeds \$1 billion today -- much more than anyone has been talking about paying to "decouple" from the Common School Fund. This raises important ethical questions:

- Would OSU accept ownership and management for the Elliott State Forest if the transfer takes place for less than a quarter of the forest's fair market value?
- We hope and expect OSU won't want to be seen as cheating the Common School Fund. If so, then transferring the Elliott State Forest at fair market value will cost much more than people have been talking about so far. Wouldn't it be worth raising this issue now rather than dragging the process out for another two years only to have it become widely apparent later? Is the State Legislature likely to authorize over \$1 billion for a research forest when there are so many other pressing needs and so much public forest already available for research?

### Topic #3: Effective Governance

Managing public timberland today is like walking through a legal, regulatory and public relations minefield. The courts will continue using federal and state regulations and laws to block the ability to conduct a wide range of intensive forestry research practices (harvesting, herbicides, stream buffers, "critical habitat," and so on). OSU would have no legal shield that is any different from the State of Oregon or private companies. As a result, if OSU ends up owning the Elliott State Forest, we expect it will run into the same public relations and legal difficulties that caused the State Land Board to halt all logging and look for ways to get rid of the responsibility of owning it.

We've made an honest attempt to understand the governance and legal restrictions associated with the Elliott State Research Forest proposal (they are both extensive and hard to understand), and our impression is OSU will have its hands permanently tied with how it can manage the property, and environmental groups will have new and powerful ways to enforce these restrictions. If this impression is correct, then OSU will be in an even worse position to respond to legal, regulatory and public relations challenges than the State Land Board is now.

- If the DSL and the Oregon Department of Forestry were incapable of managing the Elliott, why is OSU any better qualified to do so?
- Why should OSU move forward with a plan that requires \$35 million of startup costs and has an estimated \$2 million annual loss?
- What can be done to reduce the likelihood of future lawsuits and provide future foresters more flexibility to manage the Elliott?



This photo shows the first Elliott Forest blockade in 2009. Later Elliott protests involved actions such as chaining protesters in Oregon Department of Forestry offices, blocking roads, and dangling protesters in trees from ropes.

### Topic #4: Collaborative Decision Making

At the December 8, 2020 State Land Board meeting, Oregon State Treasurer, Tobias Read, asked OSU and DSL to do their best to collect public input about the potential Elliott State Forest transfer to OSU.

So far OSU and DSL have done the opposite: plans were developed in meetings the public could not attend, many of these meetings were managed by Oregon Consensus to arrive at a predetermined overall result, membership on advisory committees was chosen in a biased manner, basic information and public records have been withheld (and are still being withheld, especially by OSU), and public engagement sessions have been sales pitches held in inconvenient forums. We've labeled this process "public engagement theater" and these problems are described in more detail in the [Secrecy and Bias page](#) of the [KeepTheChildrensForest](#) website.

There are lots of democratic ways to inform people about alternatives and collect opinions: let's use them. We should use methods where everyone has a fair opportunity to participate easily. This also will encourage more people to become informed about the Elliott State Forest by letting them participate in a meaningful manner.

Here are suggestions about how we might work together to reach out to Oregonians:

- **Sponsor debates.** Given the stark choices facing us about the Elliott, we would like to participate in a series of debates with OSU so Oregonians can discuss and learn about Elliott State Forest alternatives. We would like these debates to be available widely -- perhaps through OPB -- about key issues and assumptions raised in the [OSU Plan](#) and the [KeepTheChildrensForest.Org](#) websites. By placing the debates on YouTube, people could safely and easily watch from home. By creating a companion voting system, people who watched the debates could vote and write comments in an informed manner. *Who do you recommend at OSU to work with us to arrange these debates?*
- **Inform K-12 educators.** The Elliott State Forest is currently in a School Land Trust whose beneficiaries are Oregon's K-12 schoolchildren, so everyone associated with K-12 education should be included in the decision-making process. Oregon has 197 school districts and over 1,000 school principals. The names, physical addresses and email addresses of each school district's superintendent and principals can be downloaded easily from the Department of Education website, and we've already done that. With a bit of additional work, it should be possible to collect the names and email addresses for the roughly 1,000 school board members across Oregon. All these people have a vested interest in the Common School Fund, so it would be helpful to know what they think should be done with the Elliott State Forest. As a first step along these lines, we plan on sending all these people a copy of this letter. *Who do you recommend at OSU to work with us to coordinate this outreach effort?*
- **Survey relevant organizations.** As an example, one way to collect ideas from Oregon's K-12 school boards in a fair and unbiased manner would be to work through the [Oregon School Boards Association](#) (OSBA). OSBA could send out a survey -- either online or through snail mail -- encouraging their members to become informed and vote online through software that ensures each board member gets one vote and can submit comments. Then OSBA could summarize the results and forward them to OSU and the State Land Board for consideration. Similar approaches could tell us what members of the Oregon Small Woodland Association, Society of American Foresters, Associated Oregon Loggers, City Club of Portland, Association of Oregon Counties, or other groups think. *Who do you recommend at OSU to work with us to coordinate these outreach efforts?*
- **Build collaboratively produced knowledge bases.** People cannot make informed choices if they are only shown one opinion and are kept from seeing alternatives. *Who do you recommend at OSU to work with us to set up these collaborative knowledge bases?*
  - Create an online Elliott State Forest Voters Pamphlet so people from all viewpoints can explain their ideas in a fair forum. That way, when people fill out surveys or online informal voting processes, they will be making informed choices.
  - Build an ElliottArchive, similar to the proposal at [www.elliottarchive.org](http://www.elliottarchive.org), and use it to collaboratively collect and publish a comprehensive website filled with factual, educational and historical information about the Elliott State Forest.
- **Create age-appropriate educational materials for K-12 students.** More information about these ideas can be found in the [Education](#) page of our [KeepTheChildrensForest.Org](#) website. Essentially, educational modules could be created for different grade levels for accredited courses in topics such as Biology, Economics, Forestry, Geography, Geology, History, and Politics, with the Elliott State Forest being a common "outdoor classroom." These modules could be designed to accommodate distance learning, classroom, and on-site instruction shared by all Oregon K-12 students.

## Topic #5: Being a Land Grant University

On October 27, 1868, the state legislature designated Corvallis College as Oregon's land-grant institution under the provisions of the Morrill Act of 1862. The act granted Oregon 90,000 acres of land for creation of an endowment to support an agricultural college.

The mission of land-grant colleges was set forth in the 1862 Act to focus on the teaching of practical agriculture, science, military science, and engineering. The word "practical" was a focus of this Act.

In 1913, the School of Forestry was established at Oregon State Agricultural College, to further develop this mission in the scientific -- and practical -- management of our public and private forestlands.

Currently, the mission of the OSU College of Forestry is "to educate and engage the next generation of scholars, practitioners and users of the world's forest resources, to conduct distinctive problem-solving and fundamental research on the nature and use of forests and related resources, and to share our discoveries and knowledge with others."

- Does acceptance of management responsibility for Elliott State Forest and proposed creation of a 60,000-acre de facto Wilderness compromise the intent of the 1862 Morrill Act?
- How does such a proposed management plan constitute a "practical" or reasonable "use" of these forest resources?

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## Questions for Thomas H. DeLuca, Dean, College of Forestry

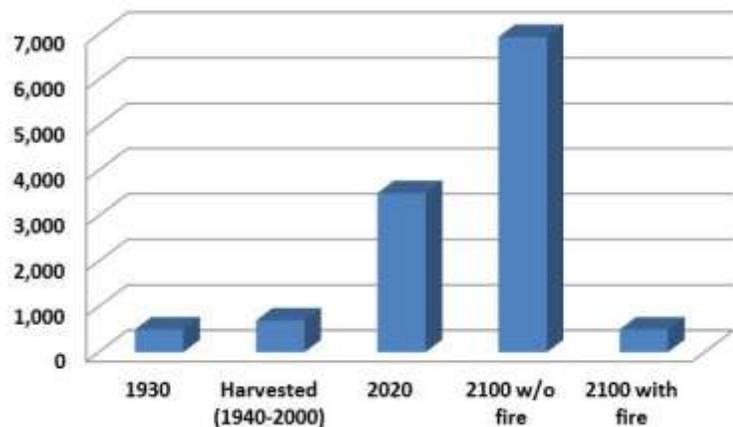
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### Topic #6: Forestry Basics

We carefully read through the [OSU Plan](#) and were surprised to find it didn't have any information about commercial forest growth per year (such as cubic meters per hectare, board feet per acre, or Site Class). It also lacked any estimate of the forest's past, present, or future timber volumes. These growth figures and stand volume estimates are the time-honored starting point of any forest appraisal process, and foresters widely believe this information forms an essential part of a forest management plan.

- Can you explain why growth figures and volume estimates were not part of the research forest proposal? What values does the College of Forestry recommend using?

**Elliott State Forest Timber Volume  
(millions of board feet)**



We prepared this simple bar graph to show timber volumes on the Elliott State Forest: past, present and two future scenarios based on the [OSU Plan](#). For more information about this graph, visit the [Growth and Timber Volume page](#) of the [KeepTheChildrensForest](#) website.

- What value has been given the Elliott's 550 miles of developed roads and trails, and what are the maintenance plans for these assets?

## Topic #7: Catastrophic Fires

The [Growth and Timber Volume](#), [Catastrophic Fires](#), [Preserving Elliott History](#) and [Competing Research Visions](#) pages of the [KeepTheChildrensForest.Org](#) website show the entire Elliott State Forest area has been repeatedly swept by catastrophic fires in a process that likely has continued for thousands of years. Oregon's 2020 Labor Day Fires show we haven't learned how to prevent catastrophic fires from sweeping across vast forested landscapes when August or September east winds blow.



Elkhorn Ranch in what would eventually become the center of the Elliott State Forest, winter snow, 1889. Lots of dead, dry, and burned snags -- few live trees.

The [OSU Plan](#) appears to ignore how fire has shaped the Elliott: It would attempt to store the most carbon -- in the form of proven volatile fuels -- on the forest's western edge near the coastal towns of Reedsport, Winchester Bay, Lakeside, Hauser, Glasgow, Allegany, and North Bend. This raises important questions about the wisdom of attempting to store ever more carbon on the Elliott State Forest.

- Aren't dense stands of older trees with lots of dead and dying trees -- such as the Elliott Forest Reserves will become if the OSU plan is actually implemented -- more prone to fire than younger, actively managed stands?
- Once an older forest burns, it leaves dead snags that dry out and tend to burn even hotter for a second or third time. Examples include the 1845-1879 Elliott State Forest Fires, 1902-1929 Yacolt Fires, 1933-1951 "Six-Year Jinx" Tillamook Fires, and 1987-2018 Kalmiopsis Wilderness Fires. But one of the guiding principles of the Research Forest Plan is "No salvage harvests in reserves ... when tree mortality is due to ... fire." Won't this create an increasingly dangerous and predictable fire-bomb for nearby coastal towns? How will this affect aesthetics, recreation, "critical habitat" designations or local economics?

## Topic #8: Forest Values

The [OSU Plan](#) says:

"A significant potential source of revenue from the ESRF [Elliott State Research Forest] is through the sale of carbon offset credits certified by the California Air Resource Board (CARB) program based on the current stock and future flow (i.e., tree growth) of sequestered carbon in the forest." (Page 26)

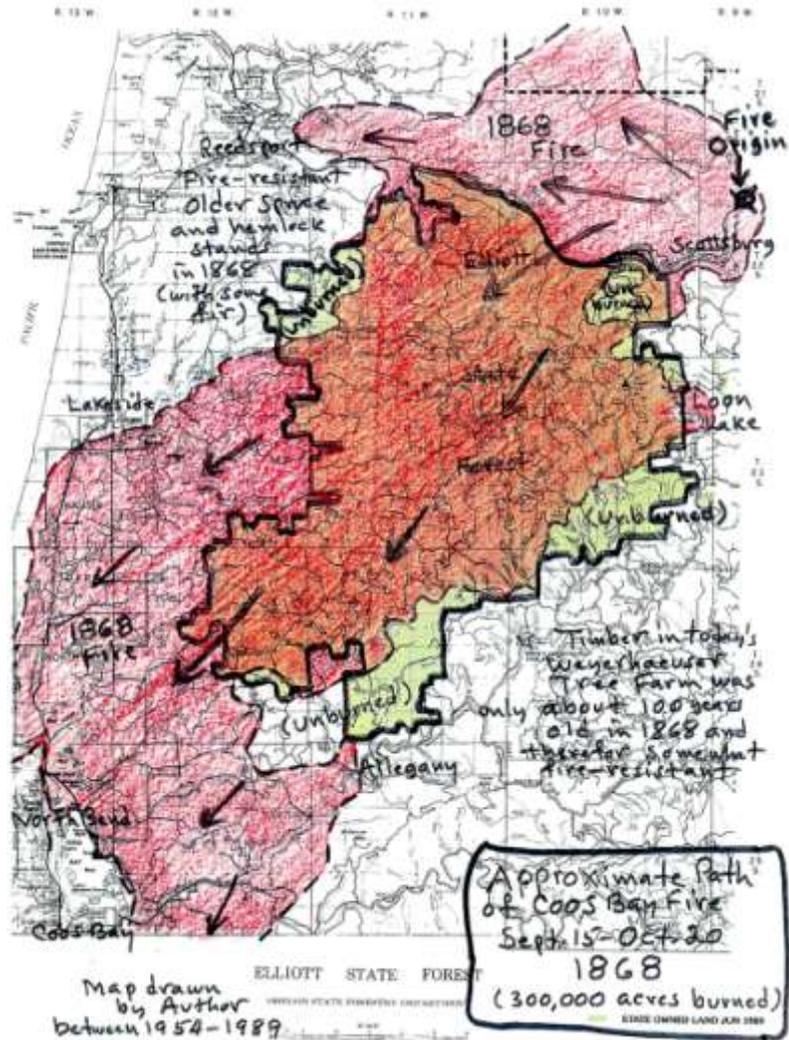
The entire Elliott State Forest area has repeatedly been swept by catastrophic fires, landslides, insects, diseases, and windstorms in a process that has certainly continued for thousands of years. Oregon's 2020 Labor Day Fires show we haven't learned how to prevent fires from burning vast forested landscapes.

- Carbon credits are sold with the expectation the carbon will remain locked up for at least 100 years. Given the Elliott State Forest's history and our current fire-fighting abilities, what is a reasonable probability estimate of a catastrophic Elliott Forest Fire in any given year? ... in each decade? ... across a 100-year interval?
- Would it be honorable to sell carbon credits for a forest with such an extensive history of repeated deforestations via catastrophic fires and other causes?
- How many local jobs would be eliminated if the Elliott State Forest sold carbon credits instead of timber?
- Should a scientific assessment of monetizing social values also consider spotted owls, marbled murrelets, lamprey, coho, and local jobs for comparative purposes?

### Topic #9: Active Forest Management

In the 1990s, government scientists, environmental groups and others were claiming Oregon had once been covered with vast forests and lots of old-growth trees. These claims sounded plausible, so many people assumed they were factual ... and some people still hold this belief.

Then Dr. Bob Zybach and others used a host of original sources to assemble an entirely different and more accurate view of what the first pioneers encountered: much of western Oregon was actually an oak savanna and grassy prairies; and the even-aged conifer forests were more like islands of green surrounded by forbs, grasses, travel corridors, and berry fields.



This map shows how a fire that started near Scottsburg spread across an estimated 300,000 acres to the southwest, covering the vast majority of the Elliott Forest. Although the map and its caption suggest this fire happened in 1868, more recent oral histories show the 1868 "Coos Fire" was smaller, and the catastrophic "Big Burn" actually occurred in 1879.

This hand-annotated map comes from Jerry Phillips' book, [Caulked Boots and Cheese Sandwiches](#). Jerry Phillips started working on the Elliott in 1956 and retired as its long term manager in 1989. He also is a co-signer to this letter.

Dr. Zybach's research was not popular among environmentalists, but few people could argue with his research because he assembled so many interlocking historical maps, early Department of Interior reports, logbooks from ships, Osborne photographs, passages from pioneer diaries, interviews with native Oregonians and career forest managers, notations in journals written by early scientists, and so on, to support his conclusions and predictions.

We now know the Elliott State Forest has at least six times more timber volume than it had in the early 1900s, despite more than 50 years of logging and active management, and we have summarized this evidence in this [Growth and Timber Volumes](#) page of the [KeepTheChildrensForest.Org](#) website.

Given all this historical evidence, a solid scientific case can be made that the Elliott currently has as much, or more, timber volume as it has ever had. Despite this historical perspective, the Elliott State Research Forest plan would permanently reserve two-thirds of the forest in an unsustainable and unstable effort to pack timber volume into ever-more dense stands.

- Why should Oregon conduct a long-term experiment on two-thirds of the forest that will create unstable forest conditions without historical precedent? Does this proposal even constitute an actual “experiment,” practical or scientific use of these resources?
- What is the purpose of creating a de facto Wilderness with two-thirds of the Elliott? If this forest type is needed for research purposes, why not utilize the hundreds of thousands of similar acres already available for study in the nearby Siuslaw National Forest?
- Won't this lead to a forest condition crowded with so many large trees that existing wildlife species will be unable to adapt to the increasingly dangerous and unprecedented conditions? Isn't that process already taking place on nearby National Forest land, and how can this be documented?
- What does the College of Forestry's Science Advisory Panel feel is an optimum timber volume for “biological diversity” in the Elliott State Forest? Is there a logical upper bound?

## **Topic #10: Useful Research**

The College of Agricultural Sciences at OSU conducts research experiments whose results are enthusiastically adopted by Oregon's farmers. In contrast, we don't expect anyone who manages Oregon's timberland to use the proposed Elliott State Forest research results. Here are two relevant pull-quotes from the [KeepTheChildrensForest.Org](#) website:

The proposal by the OSU Forestry School to create a broad spectrum of research surrounding multiple uses scattered throughout the Elliott Forest is naïve. Subsequent laws and regulations placed upon forest lands by both federal and state laws will continue to be used by the courts to block the ability to conduct a wide range of intensive forestry research practices (harvesting, herbicides, stream buffers, etc.). The University would have no legal shield that is any different from that of the State of Oregon or private companies. The land would become no more than a research facility to study the natural state of forest ecosystems while remaining open to a small percentage of the public for recreational purposes.

*-- Bill Lansing, President and CEO, retired, Menasha Forest Products Corporation*

The OSU Plan would “actively manage” only a small part of the Elliott State Forest; the bulk of it would be locked up as a de facto wilderness area. Even the “actively managed” areas would use ultra-long rotation cycles that are risky and don't make economic sense. Academic professors like to research unusual and quirky things; they live in a publish-or-perish world that rewards testing new ideas regardless of their practicality. But the rest of us live in the real world, and we cannot afford to

wait 60 to 100 years to see whether the latest unconventional academic theory will work.

-- *Dr. Dave Sullivan, emeritus OSU Professor of Business*

Because the ultimate consumers of forestry research will be timberland owners who make actual on-the-ground decisions, we decided to ask them about the sort of research they need. Fortunately, the Oregon Department of Forestry requires anyone interested in operating a chainsaw, planting a tree, spraying a chemical or any other forestry operation to apply for a permit through their FERNS (Forest Activity Electronic Reporting and Notification System) system, and all this data is readily available. So we now have names and email addresses for the 11,000 people who have applied for a FERNS permit in Oregon for the last two years.

- Who within the College of Forestry should we work with as we collect ideas about research alternatives from these 11,000 people? We want all these people to understand the research the College of Forestry wants to do on their behalf. We also want to collect their ideas about the types of research they would find helpful so everyone can understand how well these two sets of research overlap. Along the way, we do not want to misrepresent things, and we want the ideas we collect to be useful to the College of Forestry and its Science Advisory Panel. How can we do this well, and will College of Forestry people work with us on this effort?
- Will you consider creating two Science Advisory Panels: one could have the current Academic/Regulatory/Environmental focus, and the other could have people with an interest and experience in actively managing timberland? Alternatively, perhaps you could create dual tracks within the Advisory Panel so each set of ideas and perspectives about research could receive a fair hearing and support?