

Elliott State Educational Forest: The Giesy Plan Alternative

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During the past three decades the Pacific Northwest has been involved in the “Timber Wars”: pitting loggers, their families, and traditional forestry practices against lawyers, federal agencies, and the Endangered Species Act (ESA) near its center. In that time the Elliott State Forest has become a victim of this conflict, having gone from a forest successfully managed to generate annual income for the Oregon School Fund to an unprofitable holding on the verge of being sold.

This proposal is to consider implementing a slightly modified version of the “Giesy Plan” in order to transparently demonstrate the value of such an approach in managing public forestlands. In this proposal the Elliott State Forest would continue in State ownership: it would be actively managed for a minimum 20-year period for Oregon School Fund income, but also be used for important short- and long-term forest management research and education opportunities with significant national forest management implications.

Department of State Lands Director, Jim Paul, has been quoted as saying: “The debate is by no means over, there’s a real conflict here that’s hard to reconcile.” We believe this proposal directly addresses this conflict in a scientific manner that directly benefits Oregon citizens, its schools and schoolchildren for an entire generation.

In today’s notes for the December 13, 2016 State Land Board Meeting, Governor Brown is quoted in the final paragraph as saying:

Governor Brown said that it is appropriate for the Board to have another option . . . and that she calls upon the public to use their creativity, passion and time to pursue options for the Elliott that will craft a solution that will balance public ownership, rural natural resources jobs, conservation and recreational values . . . She said she is adamant about creating jobs, particularly in Coos and Douglas Counties, maintaining public access and preserving endangered species and their habitat. She told the audience that this is their opportunity to bring another option forward and encouraged thoughtful collaboration among everyone.

The proposed “Giesy Plan Alternative” would keep the Elliott in State hands and, first and foremost, immediately result in dozens of full-time local jobs, both direct and indirect; it would promote and enhance public recreational opportunities for the entire forest; it would provide more than 35,000 acres dedicated solely to spotted owls, marbled murrelets and old-growth habitat; it would focus on improving all four native coho runs; and it would scientifically, publicly, transparently – and profitably -- make clear to an entire generation of Oregon students, teachers, and interested citizens what the key differences and quantified results are when managing a forest for profit vs. managing it for old-growth habitat. This plan would also provide an excellent demonstration of potential management options of other publicly-owned forests in the western US.

Purpose and Background

The basic purpose of this plan would be to publicly demonstrate, document, and quantify the economic and ecological advantages and disadvantages of differing forest management philosophies. Intended audiences and participants for implementing this proposal include Oregon students, teachers, interested citizens, elected officials, and federal land managers.

As a general background, the Giesy Plan is a long-standing and well-known proposal by forester Wayne Giesy for better managing federal forestlands in the western US. This idea has been seriously discussed at high levels in recent years by elected officials and forest industry representatives. Prior to his unexpected resignation, it was being strongly considered for introduction (as the “Oregon Plan”) by Governor John Kitzhaber, Chair, to the 2015 Western Governor’s Conference: www.ORWW.org/Awards/2013/SAF/Wayne_Giesy/Oregon_Plan

Basic Giesy Plan Proposal

Divide the 80,000+ acres of the Elliott State Forest into 24-30 forested subbasins of 1,000 to 5,000 acres each (see Map 1), with contiguous polygons outlining the fish-bearing streams, floodplains, and riparian roads as a separate consideration (Map 2). The forested subbasins would be evenly divided by acreage into two categories: 1) active forest management for maximum State School Fund income, as originally described by law, and 2) old-growth wildlife habitat, with a focus on listed ESA species. The excluded riparian areas would be managed separately, as a third category, for native fish, freshwater, recreation, and road access.

Each of these three divisions would be closely monitored by Oregon students and educators for a 20-year period, with specific focuses on economics, aesthetics, wildlife populations, recreational uses, and wildfire mitigation. Field trips and student research projects would be encouraged, and the entire forest and these topics would be closely monitored and documented by modern technical means with all observations and findings transparently shared via Internet.

- 1) All existing ridgeline and riparian roads would remain open to public access, with some daily and/or seasonal restrictions due to maintenance, repair, recreational events, or harvesting actions;
- 2) More than 40% of the land would be dedicated to old-growth forest habitat, and entire 100% of the forest would provide excellent habitat for a wide range of native forest wildlife species;
- 3) More than 40% of the land would be managed for maximum short-term and long-term revenue to the Oregon School Fund;
- 4) All of the Forests’ subbasins would be scientifically and transparently monitored so that the general public, in addition to Oregon students and teachers, could directly participate in -- and benefit by -- comprehensive economic and ecological analyses of the differing management approaches and results: www.ORWW.org/Wildfires/Biscuit/Civic_Science;
- 5) Litigation regarding the management of the forest would be banned for 20 years, by legal and political agreement, while this educational management experiment takes place.

Assuming this proposal is adopted, at the end of 20 years Oregon would have a very well informed citizenry, capable of making expert decisions regarding Elliott Forest management in following years; as well as able to help make better informed plans regarding management of regional federal forests from the start.

The Giesy Plan provides immediate income to schools (in which guided students might invest long-term as part of their learning experience?), immediate jobs for the local community, and real-life research and educational opportunities monitoring and documenting the three separate management approaches and decisions being made on the students' "own" forestlands.

Concerns With Existing Proposal To Sell Elliott

It is estimated that existing timber on the Elliott State Forest is worth "at least" \$600 million. Other estimates place the market value of combined land and timber at over \$1 billion. The existing sales price — based on arbitrary evaluation restrictions by the State Lands Board — is only \$220 million. If this sales amount is accepted, there will be an apparent and permanent loss in value to the Oregon School Fund of at least \$380,000,000, and possibly much more over time.

This would be in addition to lost opportunities, via the Giesy Plan alternative, for short- and long-term Oregon student and public research and education benefits.

However, recent Elliott Forest financial losses of the past few years — which are said to have led directly to the current decision to sell it at a fixed cost — are seemingly more than off-set by increased tree growth and potential value during that time. Although the direct and indirect costs of ESA-related litigation have been very high, the recent reduction in profitable harvests has resulted in larger trees of greater value; and even more so when considering their size and rate of growth in ten years when several sales management constraints are lifted.

Comparison of Public Benefits: Sales Proposal vs. Giesy Alternative

The Giesy Plan proposal easily meets or exceeds all of the "public benefit requirements" criteria established by the Lands Board and greatly exceeds the public and School Fund benefits to be derived from a fixed-rate sale to a single bidder:

- 1) The buyer of the property has to allow public access to one-half of the land.
--The Giesy Plan proposal would maintain existing riparian & ridgeline roads for public access to the entire forest.
- 2) Buyer must maintain at least 25 percent of "older forest stands."
--The Giesy Plan would result in more than 40% of the land dedicated to growing and maintaining old-growth trees and habitat.
- 3) Buyer must "preserve" riparian areas with arbitrary "buffers."
--The Giesy Plan would actively manage riparian areas for native fish, water quality, recreation, and road access.

- 4) Buyer must agree to provide 40 direct and indirect full-time jobs for 10 years.
--The Giesy Plan would provide more than 40 direct and indirect full-time jobs in perpetuity.

Summary and Recommendations

Under the Giesy Plan proposal, the Elliott State Forest would be renamed the “Elliott State Educational Forest” for a 20-year period for the specific purposes of: 1) producing steady local jobs; 2) conducting a long-term public experiment to test competing methods of forest management; 3) focusing on recovery and enhancement of four major coho runs in Elliott subbasins; 4) producing income for Oregon School Fund with active management of 1/2 of the Elliott; 5) maintain water quality of Elliott streams; 6) improve forest-based educational and recreational opportunities for Oregon citizens; and 7) maintain and improve old-growth habitat conditions for marbled murrelets and spotted owl habitat on 1/2 of the Elliott.

Riparian Lands. Under the Giesy Plan, riparian areas could be managed by local Tribes with a specific focus on coho recovery -- particularly Tenmile Lakes coho -- water quality, public access, research, education, and potential development of commercial recreational uses.

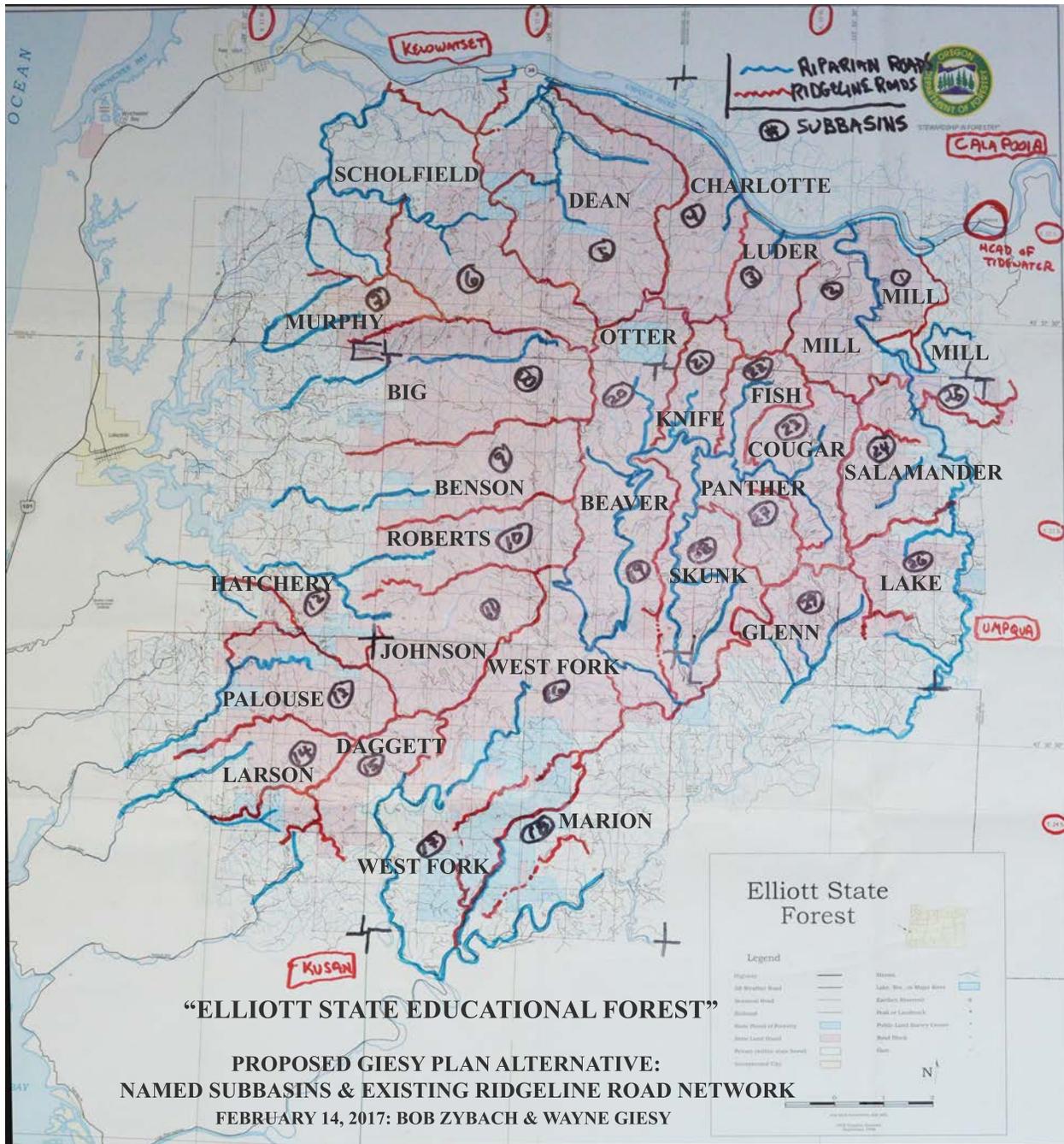
School Fund Lands. Similarly, the economic-based management of select forested subbasins and ridgeline roads could be transparently and profitably managed for purposes of public access, recreation, research, education, and generating revenues for Oregon Schools.

Old-Growth Lands. Subbasins dedicated to old-growth habitat could be collaboratively managed by a coalition of organizations who have filed suits during the recent past regarding management of the Elliott State Forest for listed species, including marbled murrelets and spotted owls. The opportunity to clearly and openly demonstrate – and compare -- their desired management approaches and outcomes would be in exchange for agreeing not to file any additional legal suits regarding the Elliott during this 20-year public management experiment.

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This proposal has two attachments. The first is a one-page handwritten note by longtime Elliott Forest Manager, Jerry Phillips, after reviewing this proposal. He is author of the definitive 414-page history of the Elliott (*Caulked Boots and Cheese Sandwiches: A Forester’s History of Oregon’s First State Forest “The Elliott” (1912-1996)*) and begins his book by describing the Forest “in college literature” during the late 1940s as “an undeveloped State-owned forest . . . dedicated to educational purposes.” The book ends in 1996 with his observation “that this Forest is at once both aesthetically pleasing to most all visitors and economically very productive.”

The second attachment was submitted exactly 23 years ago and is specific to Elliott State Forest management plans and politics at that time; from a forest and fire history perspective. This attachment also includes the 1994 Executive Summary of the combined forest industry response, placing this historical information in context to other pro-management perspectives, and as direct background to the current proposal.

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Map 1. Elliott State Forest, featuring existing ridgeline and riparian roads network and 29 suggested subbasins for proposed 20-year scientific comparison of economic- and habitat-based management approaches.



Map 2. There are four principal runs of coho on the Elliott State Forest: 1) the tidewater tributaries of the Umpqua River; 2) Tenmile Creek; 3) Haynes Inlet of Coos Bay; and 4) Millicoma River. Each of these runs is directly affiliated with three historical Indian Tribes: the Kelawatset (Lower Umpqua), Hanis, and Miluk. Tribes were directly connected via foot trails, but principal transport and trade was by canoe, typically within tidal waters.