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FEATURED

State Land Board inches forward with sale of the Elliott State Forest

SAPHARA HARRELL The World Feb 15, 2017 Updated 21 hrs ago



Amanda Loman, The World
Silver Grove in the Elliott State Forest.

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SALEM — The sale of the 82,500-acre Elliott State Forest became more of a reality after Tuesday's State Land Board meeting.

In a 2-1 decision, recently-elected state Treasurer Tobias Read and Secretary of State Dennis Richardson voted against Gov. Kate Brown to move forward with the sale of the state forestland to Roseburg-based Lone Rock Timber Company and the Cow Creek Band of Umpqua Tribe of Indians.

However, the decision won't be finalized until the board's April meeting.

While the Elliott was initially an "informational item" on the agenda, Read made a motion to amend the protocol to allow the state to repurchase up \$25 million in acreage for conservation. He suggested that land should be turned into a state park or wildlife management area.

"I don't make this motion with any particular sense of celebration. I'm not happy that these are the constraints under which we operate but it's my best attempt to try to balance what I view to be my obligation as a fiduciary and to live up to our undivided loyalty requirements to schoolkids in Oregon," Read said.

Last week, Brown released a proposal to keep the property in public hands. Part of the proposal includes \$100 million in bond payments to the Common School Fund in an effort to buy back some of the old-growth and riparian area in the forest.

"However, having heard from many of you over the last couple of years and after a lot of deliberation it is clear to me that it is in the best interest of Oregonians to ensure public ownership of the Elliott state forest for future generations," Brown said.

"The appraised value of the forest was surprisingly low at \$220 million. We don't know what the future holds and I think that retaining the Elliott as a state asset is the proper exercise of the fiduciary responsibility of the state."

According to her plan, the forest would average 20 million board feet a year in timber harvests.

At the end of Tuesday's meeting Brown asked Department of State Lands Director Jim Paul to investigate public ownership options and present them at the board's next meeting.

This has been another episode of kicking the can down the road. In its December meeting, the land board decided to push the decision of the sale to this Tuesday's meeting.

Public outcry has emerged on both sides of the conflict: conservationist who want the land to be protected and school advocates who want more money for the school fund.

Last year the Land Board decided to sell off the Elliott in an effort to recoup money lost to the Common School Fund after lawsuits halted logging sales on the land.

The \$220.8 million asking price has been criticized for not adequately reflecting the real value of the forestland.

The land board meets again on April 11.

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