

Treasurer Tobias Read now open to keeping Elliott State Forest public

Zach Urness, Statesman Journal

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(Photo: Special to the Statesman Journal, Special to the Statesman Journal)

In yet another plot twist to the seemingly endless battle over Oregon's Elliott State Forest, Treasurer Tobias Read said Tuesday he now supports working toward a plan that would keep the 83,000-acre forest in public hands.

In a statement posted on Read's [website \(https://www.oregon.gov/treasury/Newsroom/Pages/ViewArticle.aspx?pressReleaseID=181\)](https://www.oregon.gov/treasury/Newsroom/Pages/ViewArticle.aspx?pressReleaseID=181), the Democrat said he saw "a path forward" to a solution that would remove the state forest from its obligation to the Common School Fund and likely keep it in state ownership.

The statement comes more than a month after Read surprised many [by voting to proceed \(/story/news/2017/02/14/land-board-votes-sell-elliott-state-forest-but-decision-not-final/97909298/\)](#) with the sale of the Coos Bay-area forest to a Roseburg timber company. He later defended his vote in an [interview with the Statesman Journal. \(/story/news/2017/02/22/tobias-read-state-treasurer-elliott-state-forest/98273062/\)](#)

[Oregon Treasurer Tobias Read defends vote to sell Elliott State Forest](#)

[\(http://www.statesmanjournal.com/story/news/2017/02/22/tobias-read-state-treasurer-elliott-state-forest/98273062/\)](http://www.statesmanjournal.com/story/news/2017/02/22/tobias-read-state-treasurer-elliott-state-forest/98273062/)

[Land board votes to sell Elliott State Forest, but decision not final](#)

[\(http://www.statesmanjournal.com/story/news/2017/02/14/land-board-votes-sell-elliott-state-forest-but-decision-not-final/97909298/\)](http://www.statesmanjournal.com/story/news/2017/02/14/land-board-votes-sell-elliott-state-forest-but-decision-not-final/97909298/)

"If there is a viable solution that provides for public ownership of the Elliott State Forest, we should strongly consider it," Read said, adding that he would work with Gov. Kate Brown and the state legislature to accomplish that goal.

Toby Luther, CEO of Lone Rock Timber Management Company, which proposed to purchase the land for \$220 million and manage it in partnership with the Cow Creek Band of Umpqua Tribe of Indians, issued a statement expressing frustration.

"If state leaders who advanced this process never had the intent to allow for private ownership they had a duty to be clear and forthright with their expectations," Luther said. "Good will between our state and its many rural communities is further eroded by this futile exercise."

The plan moving forward appears to be centered on Brown's initial plan of issuing \$100 million in state bonds 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, she said previously.

"I have made it clear to all sides that if Governor Brown brought forward a viable alternative I would consider it," Read said. "The Governor and her team have continued to refine her framework, and most importantly she has worked to build support for key bonding components among Legislators, including the Senate President."

Senate President Peter Courtney, D-Salem, said he is "encouraged by Treasurer Tobias James Read's statement today and remain open to considering bonding as part of a solution."

Elliott State 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.



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