

2025 OLC Resolution: Elliott State Forest Jobs, Oregon Schools, & Carbon Credits

Whereas, the United States designated nearly 3.4 million acres specifically "for the use of schools" as a basic condition of granting statehood to Oregon in 1859; and

Whereas, the Elliott State Forest ("the Elliott") was created in 1930 by exchanging US Forest Service (USFS) and USDI Bureau of Land Management (BLM) lands that had burned in 1868 and 1879 fires for Oregon School Trust Lands to create Oregon's first State Forest, dedicated entirely to generating funds for Oregon K-12 public schools and to demonstrate "good forest practices to all other owners"; and

Whereas, the Oregon Legislature in 1955 directed Oregon Department of Forestry (ODF) to begin active management of the Elliott and harvest trees as they matured for the direct benefit of Oregon schools; and

Whereas, by the late 1980s, forest roads, harvest schedules, and reforestation projects had proven successful at a harvest rate of 50 million board feet (mmbf)/year, a formal management plan was adopted to continue at that rate; and

Whereas, from 1960 until 1990 the Elliott had sold 50 mmbf/year, producing more than \$300 million dollars for Oregon schools, more than 400 rural tax-paying jobs, the listing of spotted owls in 1990 as an "endangered species" immediately changed management plans; and

Whereas, in 1994 threatened Endangered Species Act (ESA) lawsuits related to spotted owls, marbled murrelets, and coho resulted in a trial HCP ("Habitat Conservation Plan") that greatly reduced local jobs, tax revenues, and payments to Oregon schools; and

Whereas, an ESA lawsuit in 2012 resulted in an immediate halt and an eventual end to Elliott timber sales, resulting in a complete loss of local jobs and a negative income for Oregon schools; and

Whereas, since the Department of State Lands (DSL) took over management of the Elliott from ODF in 2017, the Common School Fund has lost more than a million dollars a year and with an ever-increasing likelihood of catastrophic wildfires due to the increasing amount of unmanaged annual growth of forest fuels; and

Whereas, when OSU College of Forestry and DSL signed a secret Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) in February 2019, a primary component was to produce a research and management plan for the Elliott that would focus on "key conservation values," with the second "key value" being "a carbon sequestration program"; and

Whereas, in August 2022, OSU listed "several reasons" why it "has consistently resisted selling offset credits in the regulatory compliance market," including "serious financial risk"; the restrictive nature of 100-year agreements; the cost of project management; and the dynamic nature of the Elliott, making long-term compliance unlikely or even impossible; and

Whereas, in November 2023, OSU terminated its agreements with DSL regarding management on the Elliott, in large part due to "significant concerns" regarding DSL's "intent" to "move forward with a carbon project" on the Elliott; and

Whereas, DSL circulated a confidential report at that time, stating the Elliott "might qualify" for the carbon market, and even if it did, credits would likely generate less than \$1 million per year; and

Whereas, in 2024 DSL committed to continuing seeking carbon credit payments at an operating loss to Oregon taxpayers, and a cost of hundreds of rural jobs, hundreds of millions to Oregon schools, and increased safety risk to local residents and native wildlife; and

Whereas, carbon offset schemes enrich special interests, allow faraway polluters to continue to pollute at the expense of Oregon's schools and rural communities, while providing no benefit to the environment; and

Whereas, the Elliott grows about 70 mmbf of timber a year and has a well-documented history of catastrophic wildfires, windstorms, floods, and landslides, less than 1% of the forest is old-growth, more than 40,000 acres is in industrial plantations, and the remainder is in mature second-growth that had seeded in following the wildfires of 1868 and 1879.

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the Oregon Logging Conference calls for the immediate suspension of all plans and expenditures regarding possible carbon credit sales on the Elliot State Forest; that all 550 miles of historic Elliott roads be maintained for public, recreational, research, educational, and management access; that Elliott forest management return immediately to 1989 harvest levels of a minimum 50 mmbf in sales per year until updated plans can be developed; that net proceeds go directly to Oregon public K-12 schools, as intended in 1859, in 1930, and continued until 2017.

Be it further resolved that copies of this resolution be provided to the Oregon State Land Board and members of the Oregon Legislature.