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ENVIRONMENT

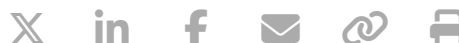
COMMENTARY

Oregon State has valid reasons for opposing Elliott forest carbon-crediting scheme



BOB ZYBACH

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 Oregon State University pulled out of managing Elliott State Forest over a state plan to use the trees to sell carbon credits. (Oregon State University)

Oregon State University and the Department of State Lands agreed in February 2019 to produce a research and management plan for the Elliott State Forest near Coos Bay by the end of that year. The proposed plan was supposed to focus first on conservation and then on using many of the trees to store carbon from the atmosphere and sell those credits.

Nearly five years later, in November 2023, OSU President Jayathi Murthy told the department that the university would be terminating its agreements on research and management of the Elliott. The university's primary reason for this decision was its "significant concerns" regarding the department's intent to move forward with a carbon sequestration scheme

that would involve selling carbon credits instead of timber. Since its creation, the sale of those logs has helped pay for Oregon's public schools.

Murthy's decision to terminate the agreement came just over a year after an August 2022 email from OSU's Forestry Dean Thomas DeLuca to the department and the State Land Board. That email listed several reasons why OSU opposed the carbon-crediting scheme. DeLuca said it would pose a "serious financial risk," would increase the cost of managing the forest and that it would be difficult over the long term to meet the sales requirements.

Three days before Murthy's decision to pull out of the agreement, the Department of State Lands circulated a confidential report that stated the Elliott might not qualify for the carbon market, and even if it did, the credits would likely generate less than \$1 million per year and 20% of that amount would go to administering the program.

Nevertheless, the department [recently announced plans](#) to continue its efforts to sell carbon credits rather than logs from the Elliott.

The Elliott grows about 70 million board feet of timber a year and has a well-documented history of catastrophic wildfires, windstorms, floods and landslides. Less than 1% of the 83,000-acre forest is old growth, more than 40,000 acres are in industrial plantations and the remainder is made up of mature

trees grown in the aftermath of major wildfires in 1868 and 1879.

From 1960 until 1990, the Elliott sold 50 million board feet of timber a year, producing hundreds of millions of dollars for Oregon schools and more than 400 rural taxpaying jobs. There were no wildfires during that time. Since the Department of State Lands took over management in 2017, the forest has lost more than a million dollars a year and only funded two road maintenance jobs, with an ever-increasing likelihood of catastrophic wildfires due to the increasing amount of unmanaged fuels growing every year.

An example of the ephemeral nature of carbon sequestration and the sale of carbon credits is shown by the active Shelly Fire in northern California, which has burned more than 15,500 acres. A July 19 report about the fire included a map that outlined 11,000 acres of burned forest owned by Ecotrust Forest Management in Portland. That land had been used to sell carbon credits.

So, what happens next? Will money be returned to investors? Will the dead trees be salvaged or left in place to rot or burn again?

These are key questions that need to be considered and that the Department of State Lands hasn't answered, according to Oregon State University.

The plan to sell carbon credits from the Elliott trees has

already resulted in a significant amount of time and cost to Oregon taxpayers. Yet, there are no indications that carbon markets are stable, and even if credits could be sold, their value would be very low in comparison to traditional timber sales. The Elliott was created to help fund schools through timber sales and as a research forest. For two generations, it has done both and could continue to do so but not by selling carbon credits.



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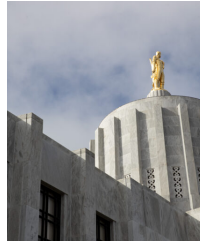


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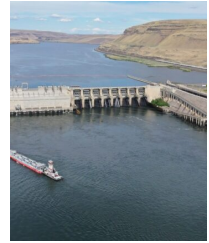
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