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### The Elliott Really Does Belong to All of Us

In December of 2016, the League of Women Voters of Oregon asked that the State Land Board, at that time composed of Governor Brown, Secretary of State Atkins and Treasurer Wheeler, not move toward selling the Elliott State Forest to a private timber company. We believed this would be a mistake. The LWV of Oregon has repeatedly stressed the importance of preserving our public lands for future generations and keeping them in public hands. Since then, Oregonians from across the state raised their voice, joined the chorus and exhorted the new State Land Board, composed now of Governor Brown, new Secretary of State Richardson and new Treasurer Read, to reconsider that sale and find a pathway to keep the Elliott in public hands. On May 9<sup>th</sup>, they demonstrated that they listened! Now we all need to be sure that any new plan to decouple the Forest from the Common School Fund is adopted.

The proposal by Governor Brown includes purchase of those portions of the Forest with high value habitat, including riparian areas, steep slopes and old growth stands with \$100 million in state bonding. That money will commit the state to protection of the Elliott's special places and allows the federal government to consider approving a Habitat Conservation Plan on the rest of the Forest so that logging can occur in appropriate places. The League supports balancing the protection of our special places with jobs for our coastal communities. The money would be deposited into the Common School Fund as a down payment for the benefit of Oregon's schoolchildren.

What's important for everyone to understand is how we got here: The Elliott became an asset of the Common School Fund in 1930. At that time, it was one of the most productive forests in Oregon. However, in 1973 the Endangered Species Act was passed, recognizing that the loss of the nation's plants and animals would be harmful to all of us. Then, in 1990, the northern spotted owl was listed; in 1992, the marbled murrelet was listed and in 2012 the Coho salmon joined the other two. Each of these species relies on the Elliott to provide them with a home—a place to nest and raise their young, to spawn and then swim to the ocean to provide our state with salmon—an economic benefit to our coastal communities and an important cultural aspect of our tribes.

For a time, Oregon found a way to both log the forest for Common School Fund revenues and to protect the species. They worked under a Habitat Conservation Plan for the owl and then the murrelet. As these Plans expired, the State was unsuccessful in renegotiating a new Plan satisfactory to the federal agencies. The agencies were concerned that the State was not protecting these special species adequately. With the proposal by Governor Brown to purchase a portion of the Forest, now the federal agencies seem willing to engage in a negotiation for adoption of a new Plan.

Other proposals include Treasurer Read's suggestion that the College of Forestry at Oregon State University should be allowed to purchase the rest of the Forest as a research forest. Secretary of State

Richardson suggests that we might be able to trade the Elliott for more productive, less environmentally challenging federal forests. Wayne Giesy, an active private citizen and former legislator, suggested we could still log 50 million board feet a year as we did back in the early days of the Forest. However, his plan doesn't recognize the reality of new science, not only of the Endangered Species Act, but the steep slopes where landslides occur, the recognized importance of the Forest as a source for coastal drinking water, and the effect of climate change with more frequent and intense storms. The Cow Creek Band of Umpqua Tribe of Indians, one of the former potential purchasers of the Forest, reminds us all that they have a role to play in the future of the Elliott and that we are all just passing through this forest, like all land, and that the land should be preserved for generations to come.

The League looks forward to the merging of some of these ideas so long as the outcome is that the Elliott State Forest stays in public hands with a priority on recreational use of the Forest, and protecting and preserving natural, scenic, cultural, historic and wildlife areas. Hunting, fishing, swimming, picnicking and hiking, now a part of the public experience in the Elliott, need to continue to be accessible to all with limited logging in appropriate locations such as the second growth tree farms.

State investment and purchase of environmentally sensitive portions of the Forest is critical to the short-term plan. Therefore, we ask that Oregonians again raise their voices, this time to the Legislature, to fund the purchase. Then, we ask that the Department of State Lands work with all the Board members to find a long-term solution to decouple this special place from the Common School Fund, provide jobs in our coastal communities and preserve the Elliott for future generations. In this year, when we celebrate the 50<sup>th</sup> year of passage of the Oregon Beach Bill, it is fitting that 2017 be the first year we celebrate the Elliott State Forest Bill.



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