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The Oregon Way Forward on the Elliott State Forest

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Secretary of State
DENNIS RICHARDSON

The State of Oregon

900 Court Street NE, Salem, Oregon 97310 - oregon.sos@state.or.us



The Oregon Way Forward on the

Elliott State Forest

Friends,

Today, I released eight leadership principles for the Oregon Way Forward on the Elliott State Forest. The decision to sell the Elliott Forest and the current sale protocols were proposed by Governor Kate Brown in 2015 and unanimously approved by Governor Brown, former Treasurer and current Portland Mayor Ted Wheeler, and former Secretary of State and current Democratic Party Chair, Jeanne Atkins, who constituted the Oregon Land Board at that time. A fully qualified buyer complied with the sale protocols and stands ready, willing, and able to pay the required sale price of \$220.8 million to support Oregon public education. Although completion of the sale was approved by Treasurer Tobias Read and myself earlier this year, there will be discussions about alternatives at next week's Land Board meeting.

I can appreciate that people change their minds, and I will earnestly consider both Governor Brown's and Treasurer Read's proposals for how best to manage the forest to meet our fiduciary responsibility to help fund Oregon schools.

During my campaign for Secretary of State, voters asked me how I would use my vote on the State Land Board to improve their lives. My response was that our state land policy should grow our economy, conserve state resources for future generations, and honor our constitutional requirement to generate funding for public education. I truly believe that all three of these goals can be accomplished. As we move forward in the discussion about the future of the Elliott Forest, I have developed criteria, listed below, that I will apply before reaching a decision.

Based on what I know today, to receive my "YES" vote on an Elliott Forest

plan at the May 9th meeting, it must include details on how to achieve the following:

1. **Education First.** A plan must be consistent with the moral and constitutional requirements to prioritize Oregon schoolchildren by providing at least \$220.8 million for smaller class sizes, more school days, expanding career training, and increasing graduation rates. The members of the Land Board are Trustees of the Common School Fund and our paramount fiduciary duty is to maximize yields.
2. **Protect Environment.** A plan must incorporate Forest Stewardship Council principles and clearly meet the requirements of the Endangered Species Act to protect critical habitat and wildlife.
3. **Create Jobs.** A plan must allow sustainable timber harvest to create permanent family-wage jobs in struggling rural and coastal communities.
4. **Recreational Access.** A plan must ensure that hunters, anglers, hikers, and all other Oregonians have access to the forest.
5. **Tribal Justice.** A plan must keep the promise to restore ownership of ancestral homelands to tribal peoples who have protected them for millennia.
6. **Generational Equity.** A plan must be financially sound over the long-term and avoid saddling Oregon's children with decades of debt. It should avoid spending General Fund dollars for management, avoid expensive litigation against the state, and avoid public debt to buy an asset the State already owns.
7. **Public Ownership.** A plan must retain options for public ownership of old growth forest areas.
8. **State Reputation.** A plan must preserve the state's reputation and the ability to negotiate agreements in good faith with business and nonprofit partners in the future.

I agree with the Oregon School Boards Association that we are both morally and constitutionally required to prioritize Oregon's schoolchildren by providing at least \$220.8 million for smaller class sizes, more school days, expanding career training, and increasing graduation rates. If the Governor or Treasurer produces a plan that meets the above criteria and maintains the Elliott as a public asset, I will welcome such a plan.

It was recently announced that the Oregon School Boards Association is considering litigation against the state for failure to properly manage the Elliott for the Common School Fund. Such litigation would be lengthy and costly. [Read the Oregonian article here.](#)

Without commenting on the merits of the [Oregon School Boards Association's](#) potential case, I will note that the Oregon Constitution states the Land Board's legal obligation is to fund our public schools.

Collectively, the three members of your Land Board have held public office for decades. We're all experienced enough to understand that we must follow the law as it's written, not as we might desire it to be written. By working together, we can either develop a plan that keeps the Elliott in public hands while generating the necessary funds for our schools, or we can support the decision reached by the previous Land Board and sell the Elliott while preserving the rights to public access and requirements for good forest management contained in the present sale protocol agreement. Either way, we serve our school districts, teachers, and students while keeping the forest open to the public. The financial baseline will be \$220.8 million, which is the threshold value of benefit to the Common School Fund for any plan under consideration.

My office looks forward to analyzing the proposals from Governor Brown and Treasurer Read to ensure their recommendations meet the constitutional obligations governing the state forest and address the criteria I've outlined

above.

In conclusion, Oregonians deserve leaders who will put forward ideas that generate real solutions to our most pressing challenges. I'm hopeful we can have unanimous support for a plan that gives our children \$220.8 million that will be invested in smaller class sizes, more school days, expanded career training, more highly-qualified teachers, and provide a fair shot for a bright future to all Oregon children.

Dennis

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