

Dear Members of the State Land Board,

We write this letter to you on Sunday, November 29, 2020.

The Elliott State Forest is Oregon's first state forest, dating back to 1930, and the state's last remaining public forest that has not been completely logged. Home to massive Douglas Firs as well as Western Hemlock, Western Red Cedar, Bigleaf Maple, and Red Alder, the forest is in danger of permanent damage and decimation as the Oregon State Land Board, the Oregon Department of State Lands, the DSL Advisory Board, and the College of Forestry, Oregon State University, are all moving forward together, as though a single entity in complete agreement with a plan that will transfer the ownership of the forest to the College of Forestry, Oregon State University, widely known for its ties to the timber industry, its clear-cutting ventures, and its ambition to lead the development of cross-laminated timber, an industry that, despite recent product failures, promises to net several billion dollars in the not-so-distant future.

We reject entirely and categorically the give-away of the Elliott State Forest, variously estimated to consist of 82,000-93,000 acres. The forest is home to 220+ species, including the threatened Northern Spotted Owl and the Marbled Murrelet. The OSU plan threatens further all of the creatures who make the Elliott their home. Those engaged in facilitating and advancing this process must know that what they are doing is wrong—nay, absolutely damning—yet they continue on, despite the fact that we now know that 360,000 acres of Northern Spotted Owl habitat burned in the fires that swept through Oregon this past summer. According to the Forest Service, more than half of this land will no longer be suitable for the owls and their progeny, who, notably, require 3-5 weeks to hatch and 6 more weeks before they are ready to leave the nest.

Given the climate crisis overtaking us at greater and greater velocity and increasing climatological fluctuation, it is not even clear whether Douglas Firs will be able to survive in the Pacific Northwest. The region may be becoming too dry. Accordingly, to cut down an old fir today is simply unforgivable. In the future, it will no doubt be considered a crime. We may never see such giants again—not in our lifetimes, not in our children's lifetimes, not perhaps in the history of the world. Given what we know now, the

further destruction of the Elliott should be considered an “extinction event.”

According to DSL’s website, letters from the public will be used to “assist DSL and OSU [Oregon State University] in identifying areas where additional information, discussion, or consideration may be needed.” We refuse entirely the notion of providing “feedback” on a proposal whose aims, goals, intentions, conditions, and processes must be rejected out of hand, and we oppose in no uncertain terms the very idea of logging one of the last great forests in the Pacific Northwest and the compromised process that made this idea acceptable in the first place. With our world on fire, forests and habitats being destroyed literally by the minute, and a plague covering almost the entirety of the planet, we're simply out of forests and out of time. To put it simply, we don’t need any further “research” or “management” of the kind OSU has in mind.

In truth, we don’t even know what a forest is. What we do know is that the few forests still standing should remain as forests. Instead of respect and awe, we find in OSU’s plan of takeover only greed and business as usual. Instead of the obvious goal of the perpetuity of the Earth, we find only short-sightedness and cynicism. Instead of frank and direct discussion, we see only proceduralism, the displacement and occlusion of goals, ideals, and values with mere process. Instead of calling things by their name, the drafters of the plan employ obfuscatory language that, automatically, indeed, almost “naturally,” turns a “tree” into “roundwood.” In answer to the question of whether the public might buy back its own forest, DSL’s Deputy Director of Operations replied in the negative.

We at the OICR have addressed this issue for some time now, and have learned a lot over the past year and a half. We have corrected mistakes as we’ve proceeded. We have filled in gaps and lacunae of understanding. We have carried out hours and hours of research. We have read the May 2019 IPBES Global Assessment Report on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services, the most comprehensive ever completed. (If we are not wrong, two of its authors are professors at OSU. Have they not been consulted?).

We have also read the OSU Proposal and the Revised Proposal for the Elliott, along with the Habitat Plan. The more we have learned,

the more shocked and appalled we have become. (Many processes succeed in moving people in the opposite direction.) We attended an information meeting on the Elliott transfer, conducted by administrators from OSU and administrators from DSL, at the Oregon State University Portland Center, located in the old Meier & Frank Building in downtown Portland, on September 24, 2019. Needless to say, no truly open process would include the holding of an open, “informal” meeting in the very institution standing to benefit from the proceedings. Indeed, the meeting was far from “open.” See <https://www.opb.org/news/article/elliott-state-forest-oregon-state-university-portland-hearing/>.

“Even if the plan is accepted, Oregon State University,” we are informed, “will still have to find a way to meet the purchase price for the Elliott: over \$200 million.” One can only wonder if these words were ever true.

On December 10, 2019, seven of us from OICR drove down to Salem, where we testified before the State Land Board, a three-member body consisting of the Governor (Kate Brown), Secretary of State (Bev Clarno), and Treasurer (Tobias Read). We sat through many hours of testimony from members of the advisory board, the Acting Dean of the School of Forestry, and other key players in the hand-off of the Elliott Forest. We sat, and we waited, and we listened; we sat through endless testimony as to why handing over the Elliott to OSU was good for the State, wonderful for the people of Oregon, and fabulous for the trees and the species that live in, on, and among them.

Some time afterwards, Governor Brown announced that she had to leave, at which point (then) Secretary of State Bev Clarno chose to turn to a different matter entirely, despite the sizable crowd of people who had come to testify and who had been told they could testify. When, at the very end of the day, members of the public, many of whom had travelled far to get to the capital, were finally allowed to speak if briefly, they testified overwhelmingly against the transfer. OICR created a pamphlet devoted to the thoughtless destruction of one of the oldest Douglas Firs in all of Oregon, perhaps one of the oldest Douglas Firs in the world--a tree that shared the earth with Shakespeare.

More recently, we attended a zoom meeting of the advisory meeting, and two listen-in meetings. We were shocked to discover

that witnesses to the Advisory Board meeting were not allowed to show their faces. Such techniques of dehumanization only reinforce the disingenuous nature characterizing all of the meetings and forums that have been devoted to the fate of the Elliott State Forest.

We oppose the transfer of the Elliott to OSU for many reasons, not the least of which is the fact that the OSU's College of Forestry has not shown a record of truly treating its many forests with care, concern, and respect. We can point to the decimation of the sixteen acres of Old Growth, commonly called No Vacancy, in which numbers of ancient trees were leveled. After great public outcry, OSU apologized for its "mistake." Nonetheless, those magnificent trees, we have been told, were sent off to several local sawmills for lumber. What seems to pass for research is cutting and harvesting timber for substantial monetary returns.

We say stop. People have put in a lot of hours, yes, but much of it seems wrong-headed. The world has changed a lot in the last two years. Massive fires have swept across the West, destroying forests and habitat for millions of animals. A plague has enveloped the earth. Let us stop and take what we now know and have a reasoned discussion about the Elliott, one that is informed by a non-partisan advisory committee, that is, one in which no one has an interest in the timber or lumber industry; one in which there is representation by citizens, both informed and perhaps baffled; one that takes into account the UN-backed Report on the Climate and its warnings about the end of our enterprise called life on earth (we are particularly keen to open this discussion, since two OSU professors were instrumental in helping to write that report). We must have this discussion knowing that climatic conditions are such that cutting down trees may be a catastrophic event; that is, given our hotter, dryer climate, they may never grow back again. We need to have the discussion knowing now that the Trump administration has chosen as one of its last acts to gut the Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918, which will lift protection on both the Northern Spotted Owl and the Marbled Murrelet.

The decision is too crucial, too important, not just for OSU and the citizens of Oregon, but for the planet itself. Everyone knows a lot more than they did two years ago, even a few months ago; the earth is changing fast, and we cannot make decisions now that will bind the Elliott to some decisions that will last into the future, nay, that will be set in print through legislation. This is more than a matter of saving face and moving ahead. No one is right or wrong—only the Elliott is correct and natural and right, but it obviously has no voice. The

habitat has no voice, nor do the many species that live within that forest. It is not enough to keep paying attention to owls and murrelets when there are countless creatures, those that have escaped our human inventory. We might want to pull in some other kinds of experts here, like Suzanne Simard, a biologist at the University of British Columbia, who writes about the way the trees and the underlying soil fungi relate to each other, take care of each other, if you will, and keep the forest and its infinite number of tiny creatures and its finite number of large creatures vibrantly alive.

OSU owns some fifteen other research forests. Let the Elliott breathe, let it stand. Let it be, if it must, lightly managed. The Earth did very well for millennia without our heavy hand dislodging its many riches and treasures, without our scraping, digging, and cutting. If we are to survive as a species, we must learn to back off, leave things alone, walk and move more delicately. We have ten years to reduce greenhouse gases, and twenty more to reduce those gases to zero. Otherwise, we and the Elliott and the idea of research, as well, will all be gone or damaged to such a degree as to become unrecognizable. The COVID-19 pandemic, a novel zoonotic disease, serves to remind us all of what it means for the world to become unrecognizable. It happened in a flash. Some say it is just the beginning. According to the great and inimical Jane Goodall, what is happening to our world is the direct result of a complete disregard for nature and an utter disrespect for animals. We couldn't agree more.

Stop now. Stop the process, thank everyone for flushing out some of the issues. Thank a process that has in it a failsafe mechanism so that we can stop, take the courage to say we need to take an entirely different stance, one that recognizes the fragility of the earth and not the solidity of the established timber industry.

In closing, we suggest that instead of perusing timber catalogues, you read Gaston Bachelard's magnificent "Intimate Immensity" and Sir James George Frazer's "Departmental Kings of Nature," among others. These fundamental readings offer us a completely different understanding of a forest not as artificial assemblages of what OSU would prefer to call "wood fiber product"

and “above ground biomass” but rather as a living, breathing entity and sovereign domain.

Sincerely,

**Anne-Marie Oliver and Barry Sanders on behalf of the Oregon
Institute for Creative Research, whose members are in complete
agreement on the issue of the Elliott State Forest**