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TO: Governor Tina Kotek, Treasurer Tobias Read, Secretary of State LaVonne Griffin-Valade and Department of State Lands Director Vicki Walker

RE: Outlining a path forward for the Elliott State Research Forest

DATE: December 8, 2023

Dear Governor Kotek, Treasurer Read, Secretary of State Griffin-Valade, and Department of State Lands Director Walker:

We are writing in response to the news of Oregon State University withdrawing its participation in the Elliott State Research Forest (ESRF). While this development comes as a surprise after the four-plus years of stakeholder effort to get the proposal to where it is at, we are confident there is a viable path forward to create a durable conservation solution for the ESRF that meets the desire of the Land Board and the expectations of Oregonians who value their public forests.

We believe the work done to date provides a solid foundation for a collaborative approach to managing the Elliott that meets the goals laid out by the Land Board nearly four years ago. This includes durable protections for imperiled species and mature forests, supporting local economies, recreation, research and public ownership.

With Oregon State University's departure from the ESRF planning process, we encourage the Department of State Lands to become the agency to steward this public forest and transition the "provisional board" to a Commission to govern it, similar to the arrangement on the nearby South Slough National Estuarine Research Reserve. This will require the formation of a Commission, the development of a Forest Management Plan (FMP) to guide activity on the Elliott State Research Forest, and the hiring of staff to develop and implement the Forest Management Plan. We believe the Elliott State Research Forest can be a self-sustaining operation with this approach and would be widely supported by Oregonians.

As you are aware, the Habitat Conservation Plan is scheduled for final submission to the US Fish and Wildlife Service and National Marine Fisheries Service by the end of December. We encourage you to keep this timeline, but only if the plan is consistent with prior agreements and only if there are assurances that the structure described in the prior paragraph will be achieved.

It is critical that an FMP for the ESRF operate within a rightsized budget. Similarly, there must be a production cap for logs that are permitted to come off the forest. Having these two components in place will avoid pressure to log the forest unsustainably and head off public opposition to overcutting.

An FMP must also incorporate stakeholder agreements that have been made over the past few years. One example is ensuring the rotation age for logging in plantations isn't lowered to 50 years. The FMP should also recognize carbon storage and sequestration to mitigate climate change as a high value on the forest and explore carbon projects, including those that would extend logging rotations while monetizing this vital climate and ecosystem service. Working with local Tribes and incorporating traditional ecological knowledge is also of great importance.

Absent the Department of State Lands and an associated Commission governing the Elliott State Research Forest, we encourage you to explore gifting of the lands of the ESRF to the US Forest Service for incorporation into the Siuslaw National Forest (SNF). Under this arrangement, the lands would be managed per the standards, guidelines, and land allocations that the SNF currently operates under. Of note, the Siuslaw National Forest has made national news in years past for its ability to "break the gridlock" by focusing extensively on restoration thinning in second-growth forests, thereby generating stable supplies of timber to area mills, stimulating local workforces and tax rolls, enhancing imperiled species habitat and that of other fish and wildlife species, and improving water quality and quantity.

Please do not hesitate to reach out with any thoughts or questions about this road map to advance the Elliott State Research Forest. Conservation groups have expended tremendous resources and worked hard to stay at the table for nearly four years. We are committed to seeing this work through. We look forward to continuing to work together to enact a long-term conservation plan for the Elliott that Oregonians can be proud of.

Sincerely,

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