



To: Oregon Land Board

Concerning the Elliott State Forest, Governor Kate Brown stated "It is clear to me that it is in the best interest of Oregonians to ensure public ownership of the Elliott State Forest. The importance of state-owned lands has increased as the future of federal public lands has come into question." The Native Plant Society of Oregon (NPSO) supports Governor Brown's remarks and issues this position statement:

The Native Plant Society of Oregon firmly supports Governor Kate Brown's intent to keep the Elliott State Forest in the public trust. Furthermore, NPSO adamantly opposes and categorically rejects Tobias Reed and Dennis Richardson's plan to sell this critical habitat for native plants and animals to the highest bidder.

Two excerpts from the 2011 management plan for the Elliott State Forest pertain to plant resources, particularly rare plant resources. NPSO finds a couple of things troubling as they relate to Oregon's regulatory framework for state-owned lands, listed species, and the potential transfer of state owned lands to private entities. This also relates to the current listing status updates that the Oregon Department of Agriculture (ODA) is reviewing.

1) For the main forest block, the plan states that 'No comprehensive assessments or basic systematic surveys for rare plants have been conducted in the Elliott State Forest. In the late 1990s, individual harvest units were surveyed for rare plants. The Oregon Department of Forestry (ODF) has developed a base list of state-listed plants, using the Oregon Natural Heritage Program (ONHP) list of May 2004, with the assistance of the botanist from the local BLM.' The plan goes on to state that only 3 of the 25 rare plants known to occur in Coos and Douglas counties have range and habitats that could coincide with state forest habitats but most of the others occur on habitats such as serpentine soils, high elevations, coastal dunes, or boggy areas in the dunes. Further, the plan states the three species, *Bensoniella oregona*, tall bugbane (*Cimicifuga elata*), and Howell's montia (*Montia howellii*), have not been confirmed to occur on the forest, but are likely present. The plan goes on to say there is a low likelihood of occurrence.

These statements from the plan seems to acknowledge that ODF doesn't have a decent grasp of what plant resources they have on the Elliott State Forest because assessments and surveys are generally lacking. Furthermore, in this 2011 plan, they are using the 2004 ONHP list as their resource when better more up-to-date resources were available (ONHP's 2007 and 2010 rare plants lists were available). Lastly, how does ODF justify a statement that three rare species are likely present but have a low likelihood of occurrence? What does that even mean?

2) For the scattered tracks that are part of the forest, the plan states that 'There have been no comprehensive assessments or basic systematic surveys for rare plants on the scattered tracts' but that there are 30 rare species with the potential to occur on these tracts.

Again, these 'scattered tracks' are part of the forest yet ODF appears to have no idea what rare plant resources are on them. If the entirety of the Elliot State Forest is to be transferred to private ownership (the main block and the scattered tracks), the public should know that state-listed species are only protected on publicly owned lands. No protections exist for state-listed species on private lands. That means should any state-listed species occur on the Elliot State Forest (we don't know because it appears few surveys have been conducted), they will lose their state protection status upon transfer to private ownership. Furthermore, while federally-listed species will still have some level of oversight under the federal Endangered Species Act, federal listing survey requirements and subsequent protections are generally weak when it comes to plants. Consultation is generally minimal and most

federal biological opinions in regards to plants provide 'management recommendations' rather than solid protection and mitigation measures.

NPSO finds it irresponsible to transfer these lands out of public ownership on the basis that ODF appears to know very little about the presence and/or occurrence of rare plant resources they are charged with managing on the Elliot State Forest. Knowing that ODA is currently reviewing the status of several of the species with the potential to occur on the forest, it seems premature to transfer these species and their habitats into private hands where their continued existence shall be under threat due to a lack of law-backed management requirements.

Sincerely,

Lisa Blackburn, President, Native Plant Society of Oregon