

Make the Elliott a forest carbon research hub

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The Clean Energy Jobs bill, which will create jobs while reducing Oregon's carbon footprint from 60 million tons a year to 50 million tons by 2025, is percolating in Salem in preparation for the 2018 legislative session.

Work on the bill — Senate Bill 1070 — comes as new survey data reveal that Oregon's forests absorb 36 million tons of carbon dioxide annually, more than half the state's entire previously known carbon footprint. This new recognition of the workings of our forest carbon cycle has come as a wake-up call to policy-makers.

It's difficult to exaggerate the possible economic importance for Oregon of the amount of carbon we now know our forests sequester. A crude valuation of 36 million tons per year, based on the California price for carbon offsets, would mean Oregon's forests absorb half a billion dollars' worth of carbon every year.

How can Oregon monetize this huge value? We have the experts, but they need support to lead us through the shift to a carbon-friendly forest policy.

The Giesy Plan for the Elliott State Forest promises one way that former adversaries can join forces to create a forest research institution in the Elliott and maximize forest revenue through a deeper understanding of the effects of management practices on the forest carbon cycle. Authorization of an Elliott Forest-based research institution can be included in SB 1070 — but that train leaves the station in mid-November, when the draft legislation goes to the Office of Legislative Counsel.

Wayne Giesy is an industry old-timer who first proposed his simple forest management strategy in the 1980s. It has found its way into timber plans authored by Gov. John Kitzhaber, Rep. Peter Defazio and Sen. Ron Wyden. An updated Giesy Plan for the Elliott State Forest is gaining traction in Salem, and shares surprising similarities with ecologically based, carbon-oriented proposals for Elliott management policy.

The classic Giesy Plan formula first protects streams and waterways, then divides the remaining forest equally between protected reserves and areas devoted to industrial management.

A carbon-oriented Giesy Plan, after setting aside 20 percent of the Elliott for riparian reserves for coho salmon, would divide the remaining Elliott land into not two, but three 22,000-acre pieces: one for industrial-style logging and a second for expanded older timber reserves surrounding the nests of spotted owls and marbled murrelets, as Giesy suggested.

The third sector should be dedicated to the study of forest management through the creation of a world-class forest carbon research institution to push the frontiers of understanding of the workings of forest carbon cycles, including production of the highest quality (and highest value) carbon credits, building on Oregon's overwhelming leadership in forest carbon production. This institute would manage the forest's carbon reserves, monitor ecological and economic effects of all management activities, and conduct public education and outreach.

Researchers would investigate job creation opportunities that arise when a forest is managed as a functional ecosystem rather than a single-purpose lumber factory, combine those with creating and monitoring a carbon reserve, and integrate both with a wildland forest fire training academy to create a new kind of forest workers' career path.

We can call the new institution the Elliott State Educational and Experimental Forest.

Income from logging could cover the annual obligation to the Common School Fund, while the sale of Elliott carbon credits can finance the building of a world-class Oregon forest carbon research institution and, over time, complete the \$120 million buyout of the forest from the Common School Fund.

By authorizing the trading of Elliott Forest carbon credits in the language of SB 1070, lawmakers can launch a brand-new economic paradigm for Oregon's forests.

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