



# HUNTING AND FISHING IN THE ELLIOTT STATE FOREST

## THE SOCIAL, ECONOMIC, AND ENVIRONMENTAL COSTS OF LOSING PUBLIC ACCESS

When Francis Elliott, Oregon's first state forester, was cobbling together the lands that would become the forest that bears his name, it's doubtful he foresaw it going from a revenue generator to a fiscal liability. Established in 1930 and the first of its kind, the 92,000-acre Elliott State Forest was dedicated to providing a sustainable source of revenue from timber harvest to Oregon schools while maintaining "sound techniques of land and timber management."<sup>1</sup> Unfortunately, today, the Elliott stands as an example of what can happen when states take on the responsibility of managing federal public lands.

**"THIS ALL COALESCES TO CREATE A VICIOUS CYCLE. FEWER HUNTING AND FISHING LICENSES SOLD MEANS LESS MONEY FOR CONSERVATION AND FISH AND WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT, WHICH IN TURN LEADS TO DIMINISHED HUNTING AND FISHING SUCCESS RATES AND OPPORTUNITIES."**

— STATE REP. SAL ESQUIVEL

In the 1980s and 1990s, shifting public attitudes over forest management resulted in drastic reductions for timber production across the Pacific Northwest. Declining timber receipts forced the state to seek alternatives to meet its constitutional obligation to the Common School Fund.

As a result, a portion of the Elliott was sold in 2014 to private timber companies in order to make up a \$3 million shortfall.

At least one of those parcels has already been closed to the public. Today, the remainder of Francis Elliott's forest is expected to be sold in 2016 and the people of Oregon are on the verge of losing one of their most coveted natural treasures.

Throughout its 85-year history, the Elliott supported more than just logging jobs and school revenue. It has provided habitat for fish and wildlife, and recreational opportunities for hunters, anglers and other outdoor enthusiasts. The financial contributions hunters and anglers make are vital to Oregon's local economies and to the conservation of its wildlife.

But access to quality public lands is essential to hunter participation.

### THE ELLIOTT

**92,000  
ACRES**

**85-YEAR  
HISTORY**

**FOR SALE AND  
AT RISK**

Backcountry Hunters & Anglers has been leading the charge on behalf of sportsmen and women to keep public lands in public hands so that access to quality hunting and fishing in places like the Elliott is protected and along with it, the important economic contributions.

As access for hunting and fishing dwindles, participation does as well. "This all coalesces to create a vicious cycle," said State Rep. Sal Esquivel in a Feb 18, 2015 interview for *The Outdoor Wire*. "Fewer hunting and fishing licenses sold means less money for conservation and fish and wildlife management, which in turn leads to diminished hunting and fishing success rates and opportunities. It's a complex problem that we have to fix; if we don't, we risk losing the outdoor traditions that make Oregon such a great place to live, not to mention losing the positive, critical conservation and economic impacts provided by hunting and fishing."

## THE ECOLOGICAL BENEFITS OF HUNTING AND FISHING

Around the turn of the 20th century, unregulated hunting and trapping had decimated wildlife populations throughout the continent. Oregon began issuing hunting licenses in 1905, and over the years revenue generated from those sales went into conservation efforts and enforcing the state's new game laws.



### OREGON STATE FORESTS



- LANDS OWNED BY OREGON BOARD OF FORESTRY
- COMMON SCHOOL FUND LANDS OWNED BY THE STATE LAND BOARD AND MANAGED BY THE OREGON DEPARTMENT OF FORESTRY

Oregon Department of Forestry 2010

Big game populations rebounded and in 1933, Oregon was able to hold its first elk hunt in nearly 30 years. By 1975, Oregonians were purchasing over a million hunting and fishing licenses and spending \$190,000,000 annually around the state.<sup>2</sup> Through the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, sportsmen and women fund programs that enhance and restore fish and wildlife habitat, control invasive species, manage marine reserves, protect and restore threatened species, and coordinate volunteers for conservation projects.

Hunters and anglers further benefit habitat through their work with conservation organizations. Each year, groups like Oregon Hunters Association, Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, and many more raise money and devote countless hours of actual labor to habitat projects around the state. Whether combating invasive weeds, constructing water catchments to help thirsty wildlife, planting willows, or protecting a stand of aspen, sportsmen are often leading the pack when it comes to conservation work. To date, RMEF alone has raised over \$22,000,000 for wildlife in Oregon, and conserved over 700,000 acres.<sup>3</sup> And that's just a fraction of what Oregon sportsmen and women have contributed. In short, a growing commitment to conserving Oregon's wildlife led the state out of a cycle of indulgence and exploitation into an era that saw the successful transplanting of bighorn sheep, mountain goat, wild turkey, and peregrine falcon, and the resurgence of deer, elk, beaver, black bear, pronghorn antelope, cougar, wolves, and a host of other species, both

game and non-game. None of those efforts would have succeeded had the tradition of access to public and private lands not been handed down to sportsmen over the generations.

## PRESERVING PUBLIC ACCESS: AN AMERICAN TRADITION

The idea that land can be held in the public trust is a unique idea in many parts of the world. Throughout European history, the aristocracy owned the land and all the wildlife on it. Under that system, the public had no stake in wildlife because it had no stake in, nor access to, the land. In the U.S., the federal government owned most of the land. However, in the 1800s, the government granted huge tracts of land to railroad companies to encourage

THE BOONE AND CROCKETT CLUB RALLIED AROUND THE ISSUE OF PROTECTING... FORESTED AREAS IN THE WEST. THIS SPORTSMEN'S CLUB WAS FOUNDED IN 1887 WITH MEMBERS SUCH AS THEODORE ROOSEVELT, GIFFORD PINCHOT, GEORGE BIRD GRINNELL, HENRY CABOT LODGE, HENRY L. STIMSON, AND MANY OTHERS. THEIR INFLUENCE IN NATIONAL POLITICS SUBSTANTIALLY HELPED THE FLEDGLING NATIONAL FOREST MOVEMENT IN THE EARLY 1890'S AND THE DECADES TO FOLLOW.<sup>4</sup>

— USDA FOREST SERVICE

western expansion. That trend seemed destined to continue, but a movement to keep lands in the public domain was growing. Sportsmen and women were instrumental in that effort.

In 1901, Theodore Roosevelt, possibly our nation's most celebrated and well-known sportsman, became President. Roosevelt helped grow a conservation ethic among hunters and anglers and indeed among all Americans in many ways, though perhaps most notably by setting aside 150 national forests, 51 federal bird reservations, 5 national parks, 18 national monuments, 4 national game preserves, and other projects over the course of his presidency—totaling almost 230 million acres. These designations were bitterly opposed by commercial interests.<sup>5</sup> The Elliott State Forest was born out of this movement and its lands were granted by the federal government to the State of Oregon, and thus to all Oregonians, not to timber companies or other private interests from whom the state could levy taxes or fees to pay for schools. The lands stayed in the public domain where everyone could enjoy them equally and where the people could exercise their right of ownership by allowing conservation to flourish.

## THE SOCIAL IMPACTS OF LOSING PUBLIC ACCESS

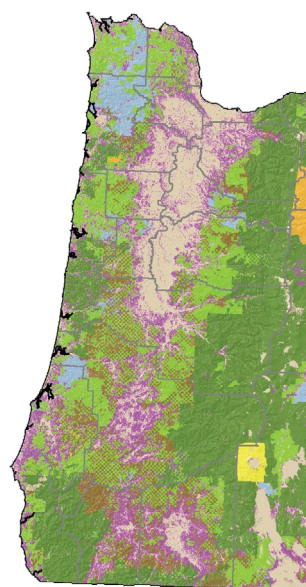
Compared to all the public land across the nation, the 92,000-acre Elliott State Forest may not seem all that significant. However, public access in western Oregon is an issue of immediate concern to the state's sportsmen and women. Hunting and fishing are strong family values. When those traditions are lost, hunter participation declines. Public land is integral to preserving those values. A closer look at land ownership and public access in western Oregon reveals the following:

### WESTERN OREGON LAND OWNERSHIP

- 52 percent managed by the Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management.
- 41 percent privately owned.
- 7 percent state-owned land or other non-federal designation.

2.5 million acres of those federal forests are Oregon and California

### OREGON FORESTLAND OWNERSHIP



- BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
- NATIONAL PARK
- PRIVATE INDUSTRIAL
- FAMILY FOREST
- STATE
- TRIBAL
- NATIONAL FOREST

Railroad Revested Lands (O&C Lands) administered by the BLM. These lands form a checkerboard of public/private property that occupies much of the interior of western Oregon.

Much of the O&C land is undesirable for the big game hunter because it consists of small parcels with borders that often can't be crossed without permission from the land owner. Elk and deer can move freely throughout these lands where the hunter cannot. In addition, many roads through O&C lands cross private property and are closed to the public, virtually cutting off the hunter or any other outdoor enthusiast from the lands they own.

Private timberlands do provide some access, but more and more those opportunities are being replaced by a permit/fee system or leased to those with the means to pay. The Coos Bay-Millicoma tract, for example, (which borders the Elliott State Forest to the southeast) is 173,565 acres of Weyerhaeuser Timber land. The fee to access that property is



\$350, far more than many folks living in struggling rural communities can afford.<sup>6</sup>

Another factor affecting hunter participation and opportunity is the distribution of game animals. Deer and elk tend to migrate to areas containing quality forage and adequate cover. Not all forestlands in western Oregon offer such conditions. Here are some excerpts from the 2014 Big Game Forecast by the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife:

- Elk populations in the Cascades appear stable to increasing on private lands but decreasing on national forestlands.
- Hunters have a difficult time finding elk on national forestlands and have limited access to private lands. Finding deer on national forestlands in the McKenzie can be challenging.
- Hunting prospects are good in all units; however a large percentage of private vs. public lands may limit hunter access in some areas of the Powers and Sixes Unit.
- Hunters tend to have higher success rates in the coastal units (where the Elliott State Forest is located) than in the Cascades.
- There is more accessible public land in the Tioga Unit and areas such as the Elliott State Forest.

There are still places to hunt, but a more comprehensive assessment of the accessible land in western Oregon reveals a bleaker outlook for the sportsman. Of the 52 percent federal land, much of it is undesirable, inaccessible, or lacking in high-quality forage. Of the 41 percent private land, only a portion of it is accessible. The rest is either closed to the public or prohibitively expensive to access. In that light, the seven percent of remaining state land becomes all the more precious. **The Elliott is only 92,000 acres, but it represents one of the larger contiguous blocks of quality elk and deer habitats in western Oregon that's accessible to the public.**

## THE ECONOMIC IMPACT OF LOSING PUBLIC ACCESS

Since 1950, Oregon's population has grown from approximately 1.5 million to over 3.5 million people, with most of that growth occurring in urban areas. The loss of timber revenue over the last few decades has hit rural communities in western Oregon hard. That's why revenue from hunting and fishing is so important. In 2011 alone, wildlife-related recreation generated \$929 million for the state economy mainly through expenditures from travel, equipment sales, and local recreation.<sup>7</sup>

Responsive Management's 2008 study conducted with the National Shooting Sports Foundation showed that access, negatively affected by urbanization, remains one of the top reasons for declining hunter participation. Specifically, the top concerns among hunters affecting their enjoyment or causing them to hunt less were:

1. Not enough places to hunt (26% of active hunters gave this response)
2. Not enough access to hunting lands (23%)

According to a report by the Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation, hunters and anglers support more jobs in Oregon than the combined employment of Nike Inc. and Hewlett-Packard, two of the state's largest employers (14,769 vs. 11,500 combined jobs). The decline in hunter participation threatens the economic health of those rural communities. In the 1970s, 1 in 7 Oregonians went hunting. In the 2010s, that number dropped to 1 in 17, a loss of approximately 100,000 licensed hunters.<sup>8</sup> "It is a fairly simple equation," said Jeff Crane, president of the Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation, "Hunters and anglers mean jobs in states and local communities that have made the effort to maintain their hunting and fishing opportunities."

## THE ELLIOTT'S UNCERTAIN FUTURE

As Oregon's population grows and the resulting pressure on our public land resources becomes more intense, the need to commit to conserving habitat and wildlife becomes all the more acute. Oregonians don't need less public land; they need more wild places where they can connect with nature.

The State Land Board is recommending a transfer protocol for the Elliott State Forest that conserves "public recreational access on at least 50% of the acreage," in addition to protections for old-growth timber and watersheds.<sup>9</sup> Losing half of the Elliott is unacceptable to hunters and anglers, but even that isn't the worst of it.



If no willing buyers are identified within the allotted time frame, the Department of State Lands may "proceed with an ownership transfer that does not protect public benefits beyond the protections provided under applicable federal, state, and local law." In other words, public access is not guaranteed.

The Elliott State Forest is so much more than a funding mechanism for area schools. It is the birthright of every Oregonian. It is therefore imperative that the Department of State Lands be committed to pursuing an option that preserves the entire forest in the public trust—specifically by selling only to entities like public land trusts or other interests that will commit to balanced management, preservation of public access, and protection for the values of our wild public lands, waters, and wildlife for generations to come. Selling off part of it only denies future generations the full benefits of being owners and stewards of their own land. Someday, the Common

School Fund will be an archaic reminder of the timber wars and the struggles over the land use policies of the late 20th century. It's up to all Oregonians to ensure that the Elliott State Forest doesn't become a casualty of that struggle.

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### FOOTNOTES

- 1 Oregon Department of Forestry
- 2 Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife
- 3 Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, <http://www.rmef.org/Oregon>
- 4 The Forest History Society, [http://www.foresthistory.org/ASPNET/Publications/first\\_century/sec1.htm](http://www.foresthistory.org/ASPNET/Publications/first_century/sec1.htm)
- 5 Theodore Roosevelt Association, <http://www.theodoreroosevelt.org/site/pp.aspx?c=elKSldOWIj8H&b=8344385>
- 6 Weyerhaeuser Outdoor Recreational Permits and Leases, [www.wyrecreationnw.com](http://www.wyrecreationnw.com)
- 7 "Oregon Sportsmen and Women." Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation, 2011.
- 8 Oregon Secretary of State, <http://sos.oregon.gov/audits/Documents/2015-09.pdf>
- 9 State Land Board Regular Meeting, August 13, 2015 p. 33-34



**TO LEARN MORE AND SIGN A PETITION ASKING THE STATE OF OREGON TO SELL ONLY TO ENTITIES LIKE PUBLIC LAND TRUSTS OR OTHER INTERESTS THAT WILL COMMIT TO BALANCED MANAGEMENT, PRESERVE PUBLIC ACCESS, AND PROTECT THE VALUES OF OUR WILD PUBLIC LANDS, WATERS, AND WILDLIFE, VISIT [WWW.BACKCOUNTRYHUNTERS.ORG](http://WWW.BACKCOUNTRYHUNTERS.ORG).**