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Director, Ecosystem Management Coordination
USDA Forest Service
201 14th Street SW, Mailstop 1108
Washington, DC 20250-1124

RE: Comments regarding the Forest Service's National Old Growth Proposal

Please accept the following comments from Bennett Lumber Products Inc. concerning the National Old Growth Proposal. Bennett Lumber Products Inc. is a family owned small business with sawmills located in Princeton, Idaho and Clarkston, Washington. Combined these two mills employ 240 people and are important contributors both socially and economically to their respective communities. Both mills have current National Forest timber sale contracts and a long history of dependence on National Forest lands for a supply of raw materials to source its mills.

If the intent of this proposal is to truly preserve old growth, increased forest management within the National Forest is required. Lately, many of our local forest lands have experienced drastic change due to stand replacing wildfire. While fire has always been an important part of the forest ecosystem the severity of many of these fires is unprecedented. The excessive amount of fuel loading, stand density and poor health has put many old growth stands in jeopardy along with many rural communities. A healthy forest is comprised of all age classes and the Forest Service should take this opportunity to use all sound silvicultural practices necessary to enhance healthy sustainable forests. The outcome of increased management on our National Forests will protect old growth stands by improving overall forest health and fire resiliency while providing jobs to struggling rural communities.

The importance of the National Forests to local communities within the Inland Northwest cannot be over emphasized. The National Forest helps provide jobs to struggling communities as well as providing for recreation and adds greatly to the quality of life we enjoy. All forests are different and thus have highly different Forest Plans reflecting their diverse needs. The methods the USDA Forest Service uses to formulate these plans reflects this diversity. All Forest Plans are put together after much deliberation and public input and participation from local stakeholders. The Forest Service's "top-down" proposal to amend every Forest Plan across the nation to address its old growth concerns circumvents this process and undermines the public trust of the stakeholders who helped form these plans. Amending a Forest Plan for any issue should be completed like they were formulated, on an individual basis and not based on a blanket edict from Washington DC.

Bennett Lumber Products Inc. appreciates the opportunity to give input on this important topic.
Respectfully,

Tom Biltonen
Timber Resource Manager
Bennett Lumber Products Inc.