



County of Del Norte
Board of Supervisors
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Regional Forester
U.S. Forest Service
1220 SW 3rd Avenue
Portland, OR 97204

Re: Northwest Forest Plan Amendment #64745

On behalf of the Del Norte County Board of Supervisors, we appreciate the opportunity to comment on potential amendments to the 1994 Northwest Forest Plan (NWFP). Nearly 80 percent of Del Norte County is owned by Federal or state governments. A majority of that is within the Six Rivers National Forest and the Smith River National Recreation Area. A much smaller portion of land within the County is in the Siskiyou National Forest.

We appreciate that one of the main goals of the review of the NWFP is to address changed conditions and incorporate new information, particularly relating to improving resistance and resilience to fire across the NWFP landscape.

The largest fire in our history was the Biscuit Fire, which burned in southern Oregon and northern California. Sparked by lightning strikes in 2002, the fire caused the evacuation of Gasquet and surrounding communities and eventually burned over 500,000 acres. Its heavy smoke contributed to health problems for residents within a 100-mile radius. Gasquet was evacuated again in the summers of 2020 and 2023 as other forest fires threatened the town.

Although our wet climate makes Del Norte's wildfire probability lower than some other California counties, overall probability remains high, with an average of two fires per year. In addition, 57 percent of the population of the wildfire planning area resides in mapped wildland fire risk areas, with six percent residing in the highest risk areas.

We also appreciate the focus of the NWFP review to provide "a predictable supply of timber and non-timber products, and other economic opportunities to support the long-term sustainability of communities located proximate to National Forest System lands and economically connected to forest resources," as well as recognizing that the "NWFP has largely not achieved its timber production goals." We strongly believe the Forest Service should more actively manage its property. Not only would fire frequency and impacts be lessened, but our economy would benefit from selective timber harvests, which represented most of our economic output at one point in our history.

Beyond our concerns with proactive forest management and timber harvests, particularly around the wildland urban interface areas to help prevent fires, we have additional comments as follows:

- Investment and development of recreational opportunities has severely lagged, particularly within Congressionally designated National Recreation Areas, leading to the cordoning off of massive amounts of land with no equal investment in recreation enhancement or access;
- Improve and expand public access to our federal lands;
- Increase and enhance wildfire fighting infrastructure in the NWFP areas;
- Oppose changes to the definition of "old growth" and/or "mature forests" that would not allow the Forest Service to actively manage forests to limit fire risks (e.g. thinning and other treatments, etc.) or other threats as a result of changing (i.e. drying) climate conditions or that would restrict commercial harvesting of timber on federally managed lands that have historically allowed for commercial harvesting of timber;
- Coordinate more effectively with counties regarding travel management, land use planning, and other related documents that heavily impact the use of our federal forests; and
- Do not expand or create new wilderness areas.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the review of the NWFP. We look forward to working with you as you develop an Environmental Impact Statement and further implement positive changes to the NWFP.

Sincerely,



Dean Wilson, Chair

CC: Honorable Senators Padilla and Butler
Honorable Congressman Huffman
Greg Burns, Thorn Run Partners