

Land Management Plan Direction for Old-Growth Forest Conditions Across the National Forest System #65356

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I am writing in favor of prioritizing the betterment of mature and old-growth forests on our public lands. These legacy forests are such a key part of the land we all live and depend on. In Western Oregon, these remaining forests are few and far between, but what is left is cherished and highly valued for all of the reasons you can imagine.

These remaining sections of intact forest ecosystem will continue to be more and more valuable as time goes on. As all of our forests and natural landscapes continue to face more stressors like climate change, hotter/longer/drier summers, wildfires, bug and fungus infestations, and invasive species.... The more mature ecosystems with the most biodiversity will be the ones to best survive through these inevitably increasing future challenges.

I really hope that we can have the foresight now to plan for these increasing future challenges and help our forests to become as strong and resilient as possible. From growing up on the McKenzie River in Oregon, we shared a property boundary with a section of the Willamette National Forest that had never been logged. From everything that I have learned and observed along with first-hand experience, the older and more mature forests have evolved to withstand these stressors more than we could ever engineer them to.

I realize that we as humans often believe we are the smartest and know best. When I see these forests I feel humbled seeing species that have evolved over many millennia to become their most resilient form, especially when it comes to wildfire.

Over the past several decades, we have gained a more scientific understanding of how our forests and ecosystems function. If we combined that scientific understanding with traditional Indigenous ecological knowledge, all signs point to older and more mature forests being our best option into the future.

I do believe we have screwed with the natural order of things enough that we will need to step up and help correct course for many of these ecosystems. I really hope we actually prioritize or are at least candid and realistic about what actions will benefit these forest ecosystems. For example, instead of logging mature and old-growth forests because they're "overstocked and unhealthy" because of 100 years of fire suppression. It would be great to instead actually reintroduce fire back into these forests.

When wildfires do come back into these forests, I hope we can also have the understanding to do what is best for these ecosystems in the long term. Even if there is high mortality after fire, these forests are still intact as ecosystems because they have been fire-adapted and post-fire mortality is a part of their lifecycle. Once we cut these forests down after a fire, we lose the millennia of legacy that has built up over time. Unfortunately, I feel like we still don't fully

understand the intricacies of forests and fire. Because of that, I hope we can leave room for additional understanding and how we treat our forests in relation to fire.