

December 4, 2024

Dear Mr. Nehl and Ms. Wyndham:

The undersigned organizations strongly urge you to withdraw or amend the Pike and San Isabel National Forest's Proposed Action for the [Lower North South Vegetation Management Project](#).

Given the current [drought](#) conditions in Colorado and the close proximity of the proposal area to communities, it is appropriate for the Forest Service to consider wildfire management strategies. However, the project area is too large for this purpose, threatening wildlife habitat, clean water, soil and trees that do not need to be removed.

We are particularly concerned about the lack of protections for older trees and the harm to imperiled wildlife that will result from this project. **We can protect communities from fire without chopping down our oldest trees and degrading critical wildlife habitat.**

The Lower North-South project proposes logging with no protections for endangered or threatened species. The spectacular landscape of the Pike and San Isabel National Forests contains important wildlife habitat and serves as a reservoir of both carbon and clean water. These forests spread from the foothills into the Rocky Mountains, encompassing a broad range of elevation changes and a variety of forest types. Other geologic features nearby, including the Arkansas and South Platte Rivers, contribute to the growth of many different species of trees and plants. Some of the animals that call these forests home, including the [Mexican Spotted Owl](#), the [Preble's Meadow Jumping Mouse](#), and the American [Goshawk](#), are considered threatened or rare species under the Endangered Species Act. Logging proposed included in the Lower North-South project would further threaten their survival.

The Lower North-South Project also runs afoul of President Biden's Executive Order 14072, which directs federal agencies to conserve mature and old-growth forests for the benefit of the climate and biodiversity. Mature and old forests, no matter where they are found on public lands, accumulate and store vast quantities of climate-polluting carbon, and provide habitat for many of our most imperiled species. They are a critical contributor to resilience in dry forests due to their resistance to fire and drought, and they are one of the [most effective water filters](#) for replenishing drinking water for communities. The benefits they provide to the forest when left standing outweigh the risk of them contributing to wildfire spread. That is why we need to keep old growth and mature trees off the chopping block in Colorado.

We urge you to withdraw or reconsider the scope of the Lower North South Vegetation Management Project.

Sincerely,

Californians for Western Wilderness

Climate Communications Coalition

Climate Writers

Endangered Species Coalition

Environment America

Environment Colorado

Gallatin Wildlife Association

Green Cove Defense Committee

Heart of the Gila

Northern Front Range Broadband of Great Old Broads for Wilderness

Old-Growth Forest Network

Rocky Mountain Wild

San Luis Valley Ecosystem Council

Soda Mountain Wilderness Council

Standing Trees

Thurston Climate Action/Tree Group

Western Leaders Network

Wild Connections

WildEarth Guardians

Yaak Valley Forest Council