

Northwest Forest Plan (Public Comment)

My name is Michael Sherman and I'm writing as a past Forest Service employee and wildland firefighter, community member, and passionate person who has lived in Oregon and along the McKenzie River Valley my whole life. The Northwest Forest Plan has been one of the key factors helping to determine the future of the place that I call home.

I want to voice my support for the amendment of the Northwest Forest Plan. Having grown up along the McKenzie River, we had the Willamette National Forest bordering our family home on three sides, with the McKenzie River on the fourth. Throughout my life, it has been incredible to keep learning how all ecosystems are connected, from the peaks of the mountains to the bottom of the river valleys. The Forest Service oversees so much land and water, which contributes to the environment we all live in and depend on. I can't overstate how important the Northwest Forest Plan is to create the factors needed for our human and natural communities to survive and hopefully thrive together.

Over the past 15 years, since I first started working as a wildland firefighter for the Forest Service, I have learned more and more about the role fire plays on our landscape throughout the Pacific Northwest Region 6. The biggest thing I have come to understand, is that the more I learn about fire, the more there is left to understand. I hope you all can keep this spirit in mind as we move into a very uncertain future, especially around wildfire.

Much of what I see being done as "fuel reduction projects" has little beneficial effect or can even make the impact of wildfire worse. Right around where I grew up, fuels projects in the Willamette National Forest have been carried out several times and have regrown several times without ever seeing fire. Fuel reduction projects can also create conditions that dry out forests and add to the buildup of fine flammable fuels while removing the large fire-resistant tree trunks. The decisions we make after fires burn can create beneficial or disastrous outcomes for decades afterward. We have to prioritize what is best long-term for the forest, otherwise, these ecosystems will start/keep collapsing.

If we prioritize profits and timber targets over the landscape and long-term health of our forests, I will pretty much guarantee we will make the same mistakes and create the same circumstances that led to the creation of the Northwest Forest Plan in the first place.

In our modern understanding of our forests and ecosystems, we still have so much to learn. The perfect example of this is the Northwest Forest Plan itself. Just 30 years ago, it was born out of a cataclysmic shift in our understanding of how our actions have larger and longer-lasting implications on the landscape than we wanted to believe. Our actions have consequences for better or worse. I beg you to please prioritize the far future with the state of mind that we DO NOT YET KNOW WHAT IS COMING.

One of the most impactful and beneficial voices that we need to listen to and prioritize more are the Indigenous people who have called this land home for time immemorial. Not only do they know what the land and waters need to thrive, but they also have a deeper and different understanding of fire on the landscape. In recent years, I have been incredibly fortunate and thankful to talk with, work alongside, and learn from Indigenous people and fire practitioners. If our shared goal and vision is to have a truly resilient landscape in an uncertain future with more fire, we have a long way to go. The original Northwest Forest Plan did not include Indigenous knowledge or people at all which was a huge loss. We need to be all hands on deck to create a future we all want to live in because there is so much at stake.

With how much we have yet to understand, I dearly hope this new version of the Northwest Forest Plan can be based on the best and most up-to-date science as we move forward. With

so much misinformation now circulating, a document like the Northwest Forest Plan is the framework needed to create a grounded reality. If we lose our grounding, how can we ever find our way forward?

Your job in revising this foundational document is one of the most important tasks you all may ever have the opportunity to undertake. Please consider the future of the land, water, and creatures that you will be affecting. What happens to them will determine what happens to our communities and people because we are all intertwined. Thank you for your effort and consideration.