

Re: Notice of Intent to Develop Northwest Forest Plan Amendment #64745

Regional Foresters Jacque Buchanan and Jennifer Eberlien,

My name is Andrew Simrin and I have lived and worked in the Southern Willamette Valley for my entire life, and volunteer to field-check proposed USFS projects with "Cascadia Wildlands" of Eugene. When I'm not working, I'm likely to be found in the forest, hiking the many forested mountains, swimming in streams, or soaking in a hot spring marveling at the remaining old growth here in the northwest. I like to spend my time and money in our federal forest service managed forests over private, state or BLM managed forest specifically because of the way that the USFS manages them, but many improvements are needed.

I volunteer much of my time to "field check" many proposed timber sales on federally managed land such as the BLM and USFS managed land because I know how important land management is to the health and economics of a region such as the northwest. This is often with "Cascadia Wildlands" of Eugene, Oregon, but often on my own as well.

I have provided testimony in support of much of what is being discussed here to the Federal Advisory Committee during a public meeting at the University of Oregon in Eugene.

In all seasons I have checked several proposed timber sales and proposed actions and I see and read how the Northwest forest plan impacts and affects the changes on the ground. I get to experience a unique and lived perspective by going into areas proposed with actions such as very remote timber sales that most of the public will never see with their own eyes. Aside from loggers, and USFS timber surveyors, the places I field check are not typically seen by the public because of the remoteness, the steepness, lack of roads, and the downed wood/etc that a natural forest ecosystem has that can often make it harder to navigate for much of the traveling public.

I often browse satellite and topographical imagery and am amazed to see over time the land management practices here in the northwest impact our forests, water, wildlife, and land. When I look at how the 1994 forest plan has impacted forests with with satellite imagery here locally, it gives me hope that we can, and should strengthen our land management practices with this amendment process.

Myself and my community get our drinking water from the forest and I am concerned with the state of the watersheds in the northwest broadly. When I go swimming frequently in the McKenzie River in the Willamette National forest, the temperature of the water has been steadily rising, impacting the mortality and reproduction of protected salmonids. The salmon are an extremely important part of the local economy and culture here in the Willamette/McKenzie valley, that deserves more respect and protection than what they are currently receiving to protect them from extinction. We need to be severely limiting logging in riparian reserves to create clear and enforceable limits for logging. Key watersheds should receive enhanced protection for biodiversity, ecological functions, and clean water.

I also frequent other National Forests covered under the NWFP, including but not limited to: Siuslaw, Olympic, Umpqua, Mt. Hood, Mt. Baker-Snoqualmie, Gifford Pinchot, Mt. Shasta. They are some of the best lands for relaxing, snowboarding, exploring, camping, and more.

Strengthening the Northwest forest plan to allow more of the forest to mature to become old growth, in addition to preserving existing old growth would provide wildfire resilience and mitigate exacerbating natural/unnatural risks for communities. Shift wildfire strategies to prioritize community safety and proven prevention measures over logging.

I am concerned that the Forest Service's proposed amendment to the Plan weakens protections for our region's forests, clean water, and wildlife habitat. If enacted, these changes would double or even triple logging levels across our public forests, open mature and old-growth trees to chainsaws, and sideline the protections that communities, wildlife, and ecosystems depend on.

The Forest Service should retain all of the Tribal inclusion plan components that are in Alternative B, but uncouple them from the forest management components that increase the age of trees and forests that can be logged.

The amendment process is an opportunity to seek inclusion from tribal and indigenous communities, with regard to cultural burning, co-management, and other management practices. This can help right some of the wrongs in previous land management decisions, and help uphold treaty rights. The forest can provide for more than timber and forest products, it can also help produce things like divine thoughts, song-gathering opportunities, and taking in the ancestral knowledge that only a true mature/old growth forest can provide.

Genuinely consult with Tribes, respect their sovereignty, and provide resources to support their full participation in decision-making. The Forest Service must support co-stewardship agreements, cultural burning practices, first food harvesting, and youth education while ensuring equitable access to planning processes. Pairing these components with the Forest Service's plan for weakened environmental protections is a false choice manufactured by the agency.

Allowing the trees to sequester and store more biomass will help with atmospheric conditions that are causing the worst of the "natural"/unnatural exacerbating disasters we are in by previous land management decisions.

By allowing the forest to have more old growth and mature characteristics we can improve and preserve biodiversity of all life, all while protecting water quality and the other benefits that mature forests afford.

Enhance and preserve our forests for old growth and mature characteristics.

We need a strong forest plan that incorporates modern science and public values, robust and honest tribal consultation, and the needs of future generations.

Thank you for providing the opportunity to provide input.

Andrew Simrin | Eugene, Oregon