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Colville National Forest EIS Comments

Removal of Eastside Screens, or the 21-inch upper limit on tree removal.

We propose the removal of Eastside Screens, or the 21-inch d.b.h. upper limit for timber harvest across all proposed alternatives. Originally designed to produce stands of mature timber like those that stood before settlers came west, Eastside Screens serve a purpose yet widespread and absolute application is inappropriate. Instead, we would propose a landscape approach which allows land managers to determine the best course of management for any given stand of trees.

Enacted in 1994 in order to protect old growth forests and restore habitat for woodland creatures, the Eastside Screens were aimed at changing a logging industry which consistently sought out the biggest, and often the oldest trees. The screens certainly worked, however in addition to limiting timber harvests the screens also began to limit forest managers who would have used logging as a management tool (now they are effectively limited to fire management). Removal of the Eastside Screens would benefit not only the logging industry but also timber managers. If a landscape approach was implemented instead, timber managers would be able to take actions as needed without being limited by the screens (not an original intention of the Eastside Screens) and larger, old growth trees could still be protected where necessary.

Kettle Crest Special Interest Area

Some of the Plans incorporate the Kettle Crest Special Interest Area, which is classified as a semi-primitive management areas that would also allow motorized and mechanized recreation opportunities. This seems like a weak compromise for wilderness area and the semi-primitive categorization seems to negate itself with the allowance of non-primitive forms of recreation. I think the value of the Kettle Crest Special Interest Area's ecological importance would be better served declared as a wilderness area. Then the timber in the area, as well as the other resources would be better protected from the unsustainable harvests.

Climate Change and Timber Restoration

Section FW-OBJ-WL-04 covers the Restoration of Late-Successional Forest Habitat. This restoration focused on planting the trees species that are historically established in areas where their populations have been depleted. This management plan doesn't take into consideration certain aspects of climate change that will make a larger difference in these forests in the decades to come. We have already seen the effects of climate change in terms of an increase in wildfire and scientists have also seen species, both plant and animal, start to migrate their habitats range further north. In light of this, the forest restoration plans should take into consideration different timber that might thrive in the forest that climate change makes the Colville National Forest. The EIS should have looked into this issue more and the draft should address this in their restoration plan.

Fire Suppression

The current fire suppression model does not utilize or limits use of natural ignitions to achieve desired conditions. In the proposed action and alternatives, there are various amounts of acres recommended for wilderness and all of these areas that were modeled with the idea that fire would be used as a tool to reach desired conditions. Currently natural ignitions are typically suppressed. New plans can and should allow using natural fire as a tool.