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Comments: Thank you for opening the opportunity to consider making some essential amendments to the 128 land management plans, including the one in our region for future old growth conditions. Skagit County is in the Northwest corner of Washington State with close to 80% of the land base in forest lands and 282,812 acres (25% of the land base) in the Mount Baker Snoqualmie National Forest (MBSNF).

Through research and studies, the Forest Service has determined that the most significant threat to old growth is wildfire, insects, and disease. From what we have observed this is true in the MBSNF and is becoming progressively worse with the lack of scientifically supported forest management necessary to keep the forest healthy. We believe the USFS should provide amendments to the old growth land management plans through an EIS that sufficiently and adequately studies the greater and larger threats and impacts to the nations forested landscape, ecosystems, and economics of our communities, which are jeopardized with the onset of hotter and larger wildfires. It is also these same wildfires that have emerged as one of the largest contributors to the carbon and CO2 emissions with numerous implications to our environment. Wildfire resilience needs to be addressed and no longer ignored for our forests that are considered wetter with our higher precipitation in the northwest region of the Northern Cascades, especially with the presences of additional fuel loading from the absence of fires. Please note that studies have shown that fires in our region do occur more seldom but can be bigger and hotter than in other areas with continual burns.

An amendment for "old growth" needs to be defined. It is impossible to make management decisions if everyone is not working under a common understanding of what is needed to be protected. An amendment process for old growth should then focus on increasing science-based, active forest management to address our wildfire crisis, and to make our forests healthier and more resilient. An adopted amendment needs to have clear direction and specific recommendations for active forest management within and adjacent to existing old growth stands to protect them from these threats. The amendment should provide recommendations to achieve the USFS Wildfire Crisis Strategy and we believe needs to include reducing fuel loads in and around the old growth and the nearby communities.

Immediate action needs to be taken to save the old growth forests from devastating fires like the ones we've experienced the last 7 years, which have destroyed millions of acres of forests including the NSO habitat necessary for survival. Aggressive actions may be necessary and may require losing some old growth in order to save millions more and protect not only old growth forests but those adjoining forest lands and communities.

Thank you for your consideration.

ATTACHMENT: 01-31-2024 - Comment Letter - re Future of Old Growth Forests in MBSNF.pdf is letter content.