

Data Submitted (UTC 11): 2/2/2024 12:31:22 PM

First name: alex

Last name: craven

Organization:

Title:

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I am pleased that the U.S. Forest Service is preparing to amend the Northwest Forest Plan, which remains one of the most important forest management policies in the United States. The 17 national forests governed by the plan are vital for the wellbeing of both people and wildlife in the region. In addition to offering numerous ecosystem services like clean air and water, they provide local communities with many tangible economic benefits. As such, an amendment to the Northwest Forest Plan should consider the needs of both people and the environment.

The NWFP has served the people and the environment of the northwest beyond measure. After 30 years, we know the foundation is strong and the science-based principles that guided ecosystem-level management were ahead of their time. As an amendment to the NWFP is considered, land managers must not tamper with its core framework and structure. These include the scope of the plan (National Forests and BLM lands across the western part of the region) and central pillars (protections for late-successional and old-growth forests, aquatic conservation strategies including protections for riparian areas, and robust standards and guidelines to achieve management objectives).

An amendment to the Northwest Forest Plan should pay particular attention to protecting mature and old-growth forests, which were not equally protected by the initial policy. This strategy would also be in accord with President Biden's Executive Order to conserve mature and old-growth forests on federal lands. These older forests offer unique habitat that species like the northern spotted owl and salmon need for survival, and are culturally important for many different communities-including Tribal Nations. These forests are increasingly rare in the United States, and face escalating threats from climate change impacts.

To that end, an amendment should take specific steps to address severe wildfires. Since the Northwest Forest Plan's initial development, wildfires have grown in size, strength and frequency. The Forest Service should reassess current management strategies in light of escalating wildfire threats and consider incorporating prescribed burning and Indigenous cultural burning practices. In general, consultation with local Tribal Nations and incorporation of Indigenous Knowledge will be critical steps for the Forest Service to take in amending the Northwest Forest Plan.

Lastly, an amendment should consider the Pacific Northwest's current socioeconomic landscape and the importance that national forests play in the regional economy. Tourism and recreation draw more people to the region than ever before, spurring job creation and growth in rural economies. An amendment should be sensitive to the socioeconomic needs of local communities and build a modern forest restoration workforce to protect these forests for generations to come.

Thank you for considering local voices in amending the Northwest Forest Plan.