

May 13, 2024

Dear Mr. Furr,

I just became aware of the Forest Service's intent to hold timber lease sales in the Methow Valley encompassing Nearly 200,000 thousand acres over the next 20 years. The planned projects involve building dozens of miles of roads; clearcuts removing thousands of trees up to 25 inches diameter; and flammable slash and stumps. My understanding is that these projects are intended to "restore" the forest health by removing trees, i.e. logging the land, to reduce fire risk or mitigate fire damage should a wildfire occur.

However, it is hard to understand how removing larger, older trees, which are better able to withstand wildfires, leaving behind stumps and hundreds of acres of slash piles, and creating new roads to make this all possible, is the best way to reduce fire risk. I need only to point out how this approach led to the rather severe Bolt Creek Fire in September of 2022. As detailed in the Wildland Fire Investigation Report (Incident WA-NWS-150) that was prepared by the Washington State Dept. of Natural Resources, the Bolt Creek fire started when an individual drove his pickup truck on a logging road that had been created a year or two before, and got his truck stuck. The individual had been drinking and likely passed out without turning his engine off. The heat from underneath his car started a logging slash pile on fire, which quickly spread given the dry end-of-summer conditions and valley winds.

The area logged that this individual drove into was tiny, maybe a hundred or so acres, compared to the areas that the NFS wants to open to logging in the Methow Valley, a prime, year-round tourist and recreational destination in the State of Washington. Like it or not, there are individuals who are not recreating responsibly in the woods, and providing increased access only increases the chance that another human-caused incident will likely occur. I've spent over 30 years hiking and exploring the Cascades, from Oregon to Canada, and both the east and west sides, and I have observed many, many younger men in pickup trucks poking around newly-created forest roads that were created to facilitate logging. They are very attractive to a certain subset of our population, one that tends to enjoy exercising their "freedoms" to drink and shoot, and otherwise behave in somewhat irresponsible ways.

The Bolt Creek fire would not have happened if there were no slash piles left in the logged areas. Whatever thinning was done in the Bolt Creek area accomplished little in the way of fire prevention compared to the increased risk posed by new access via access roads and left-behind slash piles.

Natural wildfires are the best way to mitigate the damage of future fires, whether natural or human-caused. Destruction of tens of thousands of Methow Valley forestland is not compatible with other uses, such as hunting and hiking. If the public were to propose a new type of recreational activity that carried with it the possible risk of the destruction of tens of thousands of acres of National Forest, I would imagine that it would never be approved. And yet, the NFS seems intent on pushing forward just such a plan! I think that this plan is sowing the seeds for future disaster in the Methow Valley, and the entire plan should be re-thought.

Be aware that I am not adverse to resource development; I've spent my entire professional career in the oil& gas industry. But in this case, I think it is the wrong decision.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Paul La Pointe". The signature is written in a cursive style with large, flowing letters.

Dr. Paul R. La Pointe

Licensed Professional Geologist and Hydrogeologist (License # 1338, State of Washington)

Charles Taylor Elected Fellow of the American Association of Petroleum Geologists

Society of Petroleum Engineers Life Member

2013 Distinguished Engineering Achievement Award, University of Wisconsin-Madison

President, Cascade Geosciences

