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Comments: [External Email]Quartzville - Middle Santiam Project Comments

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Joanie Schmidgall

NEPA Planner

Sweet Home Ranger District

Dear Ms. Schmidgall,

Comments (edited for brevity) from a recent letter from members of Congress, including Rep DeFazio and Sen Wyden, to Secretary Vilsack are appropriate to this project:

The impacts of climate change are becoming more dire, with observable effects already occurring in every corner of the country. Our ability to pull carbon from the atmosphere and store it will play a major role in determining the severity of future impacts of climate change. Protecting our natural carbon sinks represents a climate solution that can be implemented much sooner.

The extensive root systems of older forests slow and filter rain, prevent erosion, and help reduce the risk of flooding in watersheds across the country. The thick bark and tall trunks of mature forests also helps separate the forest canopy from fast moving fires along the ground, making older forests more resistant to wildfire impacts. Current logging practices can have long term detrimental impacts on hydrology and watershed health, underscoring the need to conserve remaining mature and old growth in essential watersheds.

Allowing logging of mature and old federal forests should become a practice of the past. Logging the last remaining mature and old growth forests in the U.S. would undermine the objectives laid out in President Biden's Executive Order 14008, Tackling the Climate Crisis Home and Abroad and his administration's efforts to protect 30 percent of lands and waters 2030 for biodiversity conservation and urgent climate mitigation action. In the U.S. National Determined Contribution announced earlier this year, the administration specifically recommended forest protections as a key climate strategy. We urge USDA to follow through on these commitments by ensuring mature and old growth protections are central to the agency's climate strategy.

* * *

This project has a major environmental impact and needs a full Environmental Impact Statement. The 89,900 acres need to be broken up into a number of projects of 10 or less units, each with its own EIS. The first Purpose and Need, supplying local mills with timber and stabilizing the local economy, has been served by timber from recent fires. It likely will continue to be served by future wildfires, the new normal. I would raise serious questions about whether, in fact, it is the Forest Service's primary responsibility to supply a predictable amount of forest products to the local and regional economy. It is, in fact, your responsibility to manage forests for the public interest, and specifically not for private profit.

As noted in the above comments from our members of Congress, units in mature and old growth forests need to

be dropped. When older forests are logged, not only is the respiratory carbon capture of the no longer living trees lost, but carbon pollution is emitted in logging, transportation to mills, milling, transportation to distribution sites, handling, transportation to final use site, and construction. The claim that logging for lumber is a way of capturing carbon is bogus.

Managing forests for wildfire prevention is fine. But doing so while ignoring climate change is like changing deck chairs on the Titanic. Managing forests for wildfire prevention and climate is a potentially very powerful tool.

Please think very, very carefully about what is really necessary for the local economy, and what is necessary for our children and grandchildren's future. Managing public lands is an important responsibility. It should not be held captive to short term economic interests. It is already becoming very expensive to ignore climate change because of lies from those profiting from destruction of the planet. It will be even more expensive to continue doing so in the future.

Sincerely,
J. Ronald Hess, MD