

Data Submitted (UTC 11): 1/22/2024 9:04:54 PM

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Comments: After moving to western Washington state in 2020 to be closer to family, I found I was spending a lot of time outdoors. Like many others, I experienced a heightened interest in outdoor recreation during the COVID pandemic, as there were limited ways to spend time indoors. But an even more compelling reason to be outdoors was, and still is, the incredible beauty this area has to offer: mountains to hike and the Salish Sea to paddle. Soon I was the proud owner of a sea kayak and joining friends on paddling adventures up and down the waterways around home.

Unfortunately, during these last three years, Washington state residents also saw an increase in the environmental risks to recreation. Dangerous levels of wildfire-driven smoke made breathing difficult and prevented access to the outdoors we love so dearly. I took a trip to the North Cascades last August the day after fire broke out on Sourdough Mountain. It was frightening to watch that uncontrollable fire on the mountaintop. Not long afterward, workers had to close the state highway. That closure put an end to all activities in the area until late last fall.

Since then, I've learned that solutions to these raging wildfires include forest thinning and prescribed and controlled burns. These practices would make our forests more fire-resilient. This restoration work can limit trail access in the short term, but it can and should be done to improve sustainable recreation opportunities for the future.

That's why the U.S. Forest Service's amended plan should focus on restoring ecosystems to a more fire-resilient state, which will safeguard both the environment and outdoor adventures. We must do this, not only for the many outdoor enthusiasts like me, but also for the long-term health and benefits we all derive from the life-sustaining forests remaining on this planet.

Thank you for reading and considering this urgent request!