

Data Submitted (UTC 11): 1/26/2024 5:48:59 AM

First name: Harriet

Last name: Cooke

Organization:

Title:

Comments: Re: NWFP amendment #64745

I am writing to strongly request that old growth and mature tree protections in the NWFP not be weakened through an amendment or revision process, but rather protections removed in 2016 be reestablished and expanded.

In the recently released proposal to amend the Forest Plans for the NW region much of the language is dangerously vague and leaves a lot of room for Forest Service discretion that may actually weaken current protections. This is especially true in dryer forests, where we are concerned that the Forest Service is exploiting fear of fire as an excuse to log forests that evolved with fire, and that the plan amendment could lead to more logging of mature forest under the guise of fuel reduction. In addition, while the proposal acknowledges the need to address climate change and mentions President Biden's Executive Order on this subject, the purposes section strangely doesn't mention the urgent need for carbon storage or sequestration

Any amendment to the plan should enhance protected, connected, and redundant reserves by including all mature and old-growth forests and core wildlife areas without roads (1000 acres or larger). The reserve network, including riparian reserves, should have clear and enforceable limits on logging and road impacts.

Fire resistance and resilience can be bolstered by preserving and restoring mature and old-growth forests. Fuels and fire management should focus on the home ignition zone and on non-commercial treatments and beneficial fire use, not commercial logging. Standards must ensure that fuel reduction is both needed and effective before logging is allowed.

As our climate reality of greater summer heat, dryer forests and resultant megafires worsen, it is of paramount importance to protect all remaining old growth forests and mature forests that can rebuild the carbon sequestration capacity for the NW, be most resilient to wildfires, preserve clean drinking water, help keep streams and rivers sufficiently cool to keep salmon from going extinct. As you reevaluate the NWFP, please safeguard these remaining areas and restore the conservation areas lost in the 2016 settlement, or expand and strengthen the BLM's own reserve system to compensate. Many ecologically important smaller unroaded areas remain unprotected.

We need to find our way forward with a restored understanding and relationship with the forests, creatively building and sustaining our economy and rural timber communities in ways other than extraction. Fishing, hiking, and just restoring ourselves in the forest are economies we can expand.

Protecting drinking water, keeping other wildlife off the endangered species list, restoring salmon runs, stabilizing the climate, and improving quality of life which is the foundation of the growing regional economy. The timber industry has shifted to rely mostly on small second-growth logs and the broader economy has changed and diversified. The regional economy added far more jobs than were lost due to federal logging restrictions. The future of the regional economy depends much more on maintaining our unique quality of life, not logging our last mature and old-growth forests.

President Biden's 2022 Executive Order on forests and the climate gave the Forest Service clear guidance that it should prioritize the protection and restoration of mature and old-growth forests (trees generally over 80 years old) across the nation as a natural carbon and climate solution. The Northwest Forest Plan governs the largest natural carbon reserves found anywhere in North America, and an amendment must recognize and safeguard the vast amount of carbon that can be sequestered and stored in these forests.

I want to thank the Forest service for their role in developing the NWFP, and as the benefits of old growth and mature forests become clearer and clearer under the facts of climate change, I want to thank the spotted owl and other endangered species for helping to inspire the protections and recovery of the lungs of our planet, the

source of clean waters, the life saving cooling agents for salmon and other aquatic species.

The plan reduced logging to such an extent that northwest forests switched from being a source of carbon emissions to become a net sink of carbon. This highlights that forests can be part of the climate problem or part of the climate solution. In addition to the carbon benefits, mature and old-growth forests also offer stable climate refugia for wildlife that are trying to contend with extremes of climate change. And as temperatures rise, we need to do more until we see the peak of atmospheric carbon and begin to draw it down into earth and trees where it belongs.

We need future amendments and revisions of the plan to expand old growth and mature tree and forests protections to help combat the increasing temperatures and assaults on our forests due to climate change.