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Comments: Dear, USFS and Federal Advisory Committee,

As a rural resident of northcentral Washington, I support protecting and restoring old forests in the Pacific Northwest as part of a national climate strategy. The Plan amendment must protect and conserve mature and old-growth trees and forests in both wetter and drier forests, such in the Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest. While the Northwest Forest Plan reserved many older forests in 1994, it did not protect them all, and this has led to continued controversy among stakeholders. In addition to protecting existing old forests, the update should recognize the need to restore older forests across the landscape, and adequately protect mature trees and forests which are poised to become old-growth forests in our lifetime.

\*The Plan amendment must recognize and address the effects of climate change, particularly the increase in very large and severe wildfires. While the NFP considers the essential role that wildfire plays in our forests, the size and severity of wildfires has far exceeded expectations. The Forest Service should prioritize ecologically-based forest restoration and reduce activities which significantly increase fire risk (e.g. increasing slash post-harvest, overcutting, expanding road networks, etc). The use of careful thinning and prescribed burning is also an important strategy in light of these escalating wildfire threats. The agency should increase its use of managed and prescribed fire to restore healthier forest conditions and consider incorporating Indigenous cultural burning practices.

\*In general, consultation and partnerships 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.

\*The conservation of the northern spotted owl, marbled murrelet, and native salmonids was a cornerstone of the Northwest Forest Plan in 1994, and an amendment should maintain and enhance protections for at-risk fish and wildlife. The NFP amendment should bolster efforts to recover wildlife, recognizing the ongoing threat of climate change and past management practices. To protect biodiversity in the era of climate change, the amendment must ensure habitat resilience from disturbances such as wildfire, drought, disease, and insects.

\*Finally, the amendment should recognize shifts in our region's socioeconomic landscape since 1994. While commercial timber production will always be a part of the Pacific Northwest economy, the distribution of mills and the capacity of the timber industry has changed drastically since 1994. Given the large amount of restoration work needed, this is an important time for the agencies to contribute to the building a strong, rural forest restoration workforce. Please consider developing policies and mechanisms that allow local, skilled contractors to successfully bid on and carry out these needed restoration projects. Such an approach will not only contribute to ecological resilience of our National Forests but also provide high-paying jobs in nearby rural communities that are invested in the health of these lands.

Thank you for this opportunity to provide comments on the Forest Service's proposed climate-smart amendment to the Northwest Forest Plan.