

Data Submitted (UTC 11): 2/1/2024 8:19:40 PM

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Comments: The forests of the Northwest Forest Plan region are vital to our region's culture and health, providing clean water and air, beauty, homes, and important climate buffers to our community, especially in our old growth forests.

In amending the NWFP, it is crucial that we ensure that these life-supporting ecosystem benefits continue on in our national forests, and that they remain a natural solution to climate change by absorbing and storing carbon in their leaves, branches, trunks and roots. Here are key considerations for any changes to the NFP:

First, the amendment must protect and conserve mature and old-growth trees and forests in both moist and seasonally dry forests by bringing an end to commercial logging on National Forest land within its jurisdiction. While the NWFP reserved many older forests in 1994, it failed to protect them all, leading to controversy among stakeholders. Thus, the NWFP amendment must sustain and foster older forests and trees into the future.

Second, the amendment must recognize and address the effects of climate change. The Forest Service should reassess current wildfire management strategies in light of escalating wildfire activity. Wildfire management activities such as thinning and fuels reduction should only be focused in and around home sites and communities. Additionally, the Forest Service should consider incorporating Indigenous cultural burning practices and Wildland Fire Use as available fire management tools. In general, consultation 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.

Third, conservation of the northern spotted owl, marbled murrelet, and native salmonids was a cornerstone of the 1994 NFP, and an amendment should 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 that natural processes are maintained.

Finally, the amendment should recognize shifts in our region's socioeconomic landscape since 1994. While forest management in some form will always be a part of the Pacific Northwest economy, recreation and other pursuits now draw more people to our region than ever before. Building a modern forest workforce focused on ecological restoration of riparian and planted areas for the benefit of wildlife, fish, water, and biodiversity will contribute to ecological resilience of our National Forests and ensure continued public enjoyment of these lands we all value.

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