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Comments: In the southern portion of the Northwest Forest Plan (the Plan), the Forest Service has failed on most plan deliverables. Especially in the last decade, there has been a significant loss of forest habitat for most species, including Threatened and Endangered species. Public forests have become net carbon sources due to wildfire emissions and lack of forest regeneration activities. Private lands and communities have been damaged or destroyed by wildfires managed by federal agencies. Northern spotted owl habitat and activity centers (presumably the reason for the Plan) have been decimated. Forests are overstocked and riddled with disease and insect mortality that the Forest Service is either incapable of, or not interested in treating to restore forest health and resilience.

Undersecretary for Natural Resources and Environment, Dr. Homer Wilkes, released a press statement last week touting the Forest Services "historic investments" and accomplishments in 2023. As a person who lives and works surrounded by National Forests, I have to strongly disagree. I have seen some project advance, after years of analysis, but there doesn't seem to be any movement toward making our local forests healthy or resilient.

The Plan also discussed making forest dependent communities resilient and stable, with forest management being reliable and sustainable. In the southern Plan area, this has been factually empty.

As management choices on public lands continue to have strongly negative effects on many of the neighboring private lands and communities, we need to have a change in management strategies. As more critical habitat for threatened, endangered, rare, or sensitive species is lost, we need to have a significant change in management strategies. As our public forests increasingly become major sources of air pollution and greenhouse gases, we need to have a significant change in management strategies. As forests, both young and mature, convert to non-forest habitats through repeated severe wildfire and other "natural" events, we need to have a significant change in management strategies.

Based on the changes to public forests I've observed in my brief 42 year career as a professional forester, we are likely to lose most of our western national forests in the next couple of generations. How will we explain to future generations that the No Management decision was appropriate or sustainable? The National Forests must be actively managed if we want to have forests in the future. Otherwise, why have national "forests".