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Organization:

Title:

Comments: To: Director, Ecosystem Management Coordination, Planning Team Leader and others on the Planning Team,

Thank you for this opportunity to submit further comments on the Land Management Plan Direction for Old-Growth Forest Conditions across the National Forest System. In my opinion this is a positive direction for the US Forest Service to pursue which is long overdue, but greatly appreciated. As someone who participated on the Old-Growth ID Team for the Plan Revision for the Pisgah-Nantahala NF in the early 1990's, I'm glad to see old-growth forest ecosystems get the spotlight they deserve, let's just hope it's for the better.

Seeing Indigenous Knowledge at the forefront is also a welcoming sign, as is the need to protect aquatic ecosystems and riparian zones. As someone who lives near National Forest lands and the headwaters for the Eastcoast's water supply, I can clearly testify that these protected mature forest lands are where some of the cleanest water in the Eastern US originate. This is backed up by the ongoing research of Dr. David Penrose and his associates. I would urge that it is crucial to protect these headwaters under the management directions for Old-Growth to maintain and improve water quality. These areas should be prioritized for establishing baseline data. New species are still being discovered and described in these headwaters.

I would also like to suggest that future FLMPs, in addressing Old-Growth characteristics and management, put an extra emphasis on fungal communities when describing forest types. It is increasingly becoming understood that mycorrhizal health is a strong indicator of forest health. While my views are strictly mine and not the official views of any organization, I currently serve on the Asheville Mushroom Club (AMC) Foray Committee and am a member of NAMA (North American Mycological Association), and I can assure you the conservation of rare or threatened fungal species and their associated communities is of growing concern. In fact it was recently noted in recent AMC communications that accessing old growth stands in the Southern Appalachians is difficult for club members to access because they are often located in steep and distant difficult to access sites. Thus the only reason these older stands remain and were never logged.

As fungi and foraging are increasingly becoming more popular and mainstream in the US, it would behoove the Forest Service to increasingly tie the significance of Old-Growth and mature forests to the sustainability of mushroom harvesting for economic and cultural purposes. Additionally, Old-Growth needs to be expanded and more accessible for future generations to experience, the continuance of Indigenous Knowledge and climate resilience.

While these comments may be limited in scope, they address and touch on some of the issues I and others in my family and community find to be of utmost importance. I look forward to seeing Old-Growth management take a leading role in the future of Land Management Plans across the country and hope to see improvement in the stewardship of our public lands.

Thank you once again for the opportunity to comment on this important topic.

Sincerely,

Rodney Webb