

Data Submitted (UTC 11): 2/3/2024 3:15:59 AM

First name: Natalie

Last name: Stameroff

Organization:

Title:

Comments:

Dear Regional Foresters Jacqueline Buchanan and Jennifer Eberlien,

Please accept this comment as part of the scoping period for the proposed Northwest Forest Plan amendment. I am submitting a comment on this amendment because I am studying forest ecology and regenerative landscape techniques as well as working as a subcontractor creating wildlife trees in previously logged areas. I value the diverse mature forest not only as an inspiration for the landscape regeneration I am trying to create but as a place I regenerate my whole being, body, mind and spirit. I belong to the mushroom foraging club and frequently seek food, as well as herbal medicine in the forest. I highly value the other than human species who are still living among us and consider their well being as important as others in my human family.

The Northwest Forest Plan was instrumental in protecting much of the remaining old-growth forests in our region, ensuring that these places can continue to function as habitat for endangered species and other plants and animals associated with these forests. But not all of the remaining old-growth was protected. Amendments to the plan must protect the remaining old-growth forests and trees outside of reserves and work to grow, expand, and connect these vital ecosystems.

Old-growth and mature forests contain some of the last shreds of complex biodiversity in our local ecosystems. We will need as much biological diversity as possible for life to continue to adapt to the extreme disturbances we are already experiencing due to climate change and biodiversity loss. Ecosystems with more biodiversity are simply more resilient to stress than less diverse systems. First and foremost forest ecosystem health must have priority over timber sale volume. Mature and old growth forests must not be converted to earlier stages of succession because the older forests are necessary for regulating the climate and water cycle that the younger forests depend on. Close old logging roads to help the forest regain complete canopy cover and make it easy for species to travel between canopies. If you must build roads do them on close to contour so they are used as water retention structures rather than draining the landscape.

Since time immemorial, fire has had a critical role across the northwest and will continue to shape these landscapes and ecosystems into the future. Amendments to the plan need to recognize the important role of fire and work to shift policy away from full suppression of all fires. Amendments should prioritize protecting communities, while also recognizing that during extreme weather events, the effectiveness of "fuels treatments" is dramatically reduced.

Amendments should bolster efforts to reintroduce beneficial fire to dry forest ecosystems while prohibiting "fuels treatments" that aren't grounded in the current and growing understanding of fire and its role in the variety of forest types across the Northwest Forest Plan area.

The lowest fire hazard conditions exist in late succession forests which contain large trees. Mature douglas firs have evolved with fire and can withstand fire. Salvage logging must be regulated so that forests can recover naturally. The soils are very brittle after fire and are especially negatively impacted by large machines making it much more difficult for the forest to recover after fire and encouraging fire to come back again and again.

The Northwest Forest Plan does not include the traditional ecological knowledge held within the varied and diverse tribes that are indigenous to the region - something the original authors of the plan openly regret. The ancestors of these tribes shaped and stewarded the landscapes and ecosystems now managed by the Forest Service and the Northwest Forest Plan. Incorporating Indigenous knowledge, perspectives and goals into the proposed amendment is essential - especially (but not limited to) the beneficial use of fire.

Climate change caused by a reliance on fossil fuels is projected to bring about a wide range of impacts to northwest forests and our understanding of the natural processes which shape these ecosystems. Amendments must recognize the incredible carbon capture and storage potential of northwest forests - especially forests of the western cascade and coastal ranges of Washington and Oregon.

Habitats for naturally evolved species must be retained across the landscape and can act as a refuge for many species from the great disturbances that climate change is bringing about.

There are countless communities scattered across our region whose identities, cultures, and economies are linked to the forests managed under the Northwest Forest Plan. Amendments to the plan must recognize the social and economic changes that have occurred in the 30 years since the plan's creation and strive to build a workforce based on restoration and reciprocity. The forest potentially holds many other streams of income for rural communities and must be tended in a way that restores cut over and degraded forests to continue providing sustaining resources for generations to come. This can be done through supporting cottage industries, offering forest stewardship opportunities, and focusing on industries like tourism that value environmental amenities. The long term community health must be prioritized over timber sale volume. Water, forest, and fish resources must be restored along with the forest to have a functional economy.