

Data Submitted (UTC 11): 1/30/2024 6:47:29 PM

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Comments: [External Email]Please update the NW Forest Plan to protect our mature and old-growth forests.

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Dear Ms. Buchanan,

I'm writing to comment on the Forest Service's intent to prepare an environmental impact statement for an amendment to the Northwest Forest Plan.

The Northwest Forest Plan is a science-based, regional ecosystem management plan to ensure the viability of fish and wildlife associated with late-successional and old-growth forest ecosystems in the Pacific Northwest. It also recognizes and supports the economic viability local communities. Forest ecosystems are vital to our region, providing cold, clean water and other ecosystem services for people and wildlife. Increasingly, the forests' role in mitigating against climate change has become important. Older forests host biological diversity, places for contemplation and recreation, and job opportunities.

Since its establishment in 1994, it has improved watershed conditions and reduced threats to mature and old-growth forests and the plants and animals living there, including rare and unique species only found in the Pacific Northwest.

To meet these challenges and to secure healthy ecosystems into the future, the Forest Service should take a targeted, science-based approach to amend the NFP for climate resilience. Specifically, the amendment should:

Protect mature and old-growth stands in moist forests and protect mature and old-growth trees in seasonally dry forests. Older stands and trees are vital to storing carbon, supporting biological diversity, and resisting stress from fire, drought, and other disturbances.

Recognize and address threats from climate change, such as an increasing flood and fire activity.

Establish habitat connectivity standards and guidelines for wildlife moving to adapt to changing climate and habitat conditions.

Prescribe and manage burns at scale and frequency to restore ecologically characteristic fire activity in fire-prone forests.

Partner with Tribes to develop management goals and strategies related to co-management and co-stewardship informed by indigenous knowledge.

Support local communities through the creation of a restoration workforce, providing economic opportunities for smaller, local firms, processing of restoration by-products, and sustainable recreation opportunities.

Maintain and improve protections for at-risk fish and wildlife to ensure that the plan sustains the ecological

integrity of national forests.

Thank you for this opportunity to provide comments on the Forest Service's proposed climate-smart amendment to the Northwest Forest Plan. The NW Forest Plan was a worthy effort 30 years ago, and now deserves to be updated to reflect new conditions and demands.

Regards,

Woody Wheeler

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