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Organization:

Title:

Comments: Hi Amanda Milburn and Forest Planning Team,

I have been a full-time commercial forager for a little over eight years. I am writing to bring attention to the importance of incorporating fungi into the new forest management plan for Lolo NF.

Although my business is based in California, I travel to national forests all over the West in pursuit of precious edible fungi that I provide to restaurants and chefs. I frequently work with folks who are gathering mushrooms in Montana. My business helps support dozens of foragers who are earning a living off of non-timber forest products. The so-called wild food industry is a relatively recent but large and growing industry that utilizes living trees and intact forest ecologies for the delicious and healthy food products they can provide sustainably season after season.

As any mushroom hunter can attest, mushroom patches are special and often very difficult to find. Usually only a tiny portion of the potential habitat (ie suitable plant and tree associates) host precious fungi. So maintaining these patches is critical and does not require setting much aside. Studies have shown that the dollar value of a mushroom patch often exceeds the timber value of its host trees. Furthermore mycorrhizal fungi are important for forest health - mycelium helps bring trace nutrients to the roots of trees. Keeping mushroom patches alive likely improves a forest's resilience to pests, disease, and a changing climate.

I feel compelled to act in this matter having frequently seen timber operations destroy finite mushroom patches that could have been easily spared. A simple mycological survey before cutting can reveal which specific trees or areas should be avoided to maintain fungal diversity.

Management plans have long incorporated considerations for flora and fauna. Now is the time to add fungi as well, in recognition of the critical role fungi play in our forests and their growing economic and cultural value.

Thank you for your time and consideration of my thoughts for this process.

Bryan Jessop, Morchella Wild Foods