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Comments: I am a professional naturalist based in Winthrop with a lifelong interest in studying the science of forest ecology. I have several bookshelves of textbooks and Forest Service research papers on the dynamics of forest ecosystems and I have a deep understanding of this science based on four decades of close study. Based on this knowledge, I am opposed to this project as it currently stands. Thinning forests does not decrease the risk of wildfires. In fact, logging increases fire danger by opening, homogenizing, and drying forest systems. We hear that forests are burning because there's too much fuel, but if fire danger was connected to fuel, then the worst fires in the nation would occur in the Pacific Northwest where the forests have the most fuels, and that's not the case. Dry, windy weather is the primary spreader of fires, not fuel, so opening and thinning the forests introduces and increases wind speeds. Not only that, but exposing, drying, and heating the soil prevents understory plants and animals from ever returning, so this becomes a long term and perhaps permanent impact that is not acceptable. One of the main elements missing after a logging or thinning project are ants, and ants are the primary, and usually the only agent that disperses and plants the seeds of understory vegetation. How is the Forest Service accounting for the loss of this understory ecosystem? Where is the evidence showing that forests grow back? From what I've read, it's clear that in all the areas that have been studied even after 150 years the forests still haven't returned. Logging destroys soil structure, removes vital nutrients, increases soil temperature, and introduces invasive weeds that the Forest Service makes no attempt to control or eliminate. It's also been documented that logging and thinning reduces annual water flow in a forest by 50% and this impact is still ongoing after 150 years. How is drying out our forest making it more resilient? It's also true that 85% of the carbon released from a forest is released by logging, and carbon levels in the earth's atmosphere are higher now than they've been in the past 50,000 years, plus logging opens up the soil and kills soil fungi which releases even more carbon into the atmosphere. How is irresponsibly pumping more carbon into the atmosphere a solution for our warming climate and drying forests?

The people and economy of the Methow Valley depends on outdoor recreation, and these values are irrevocably compromised by industrial logging at this scale. But, having attended your public events and conversations, it's clear that the Forest Service isn't listening to the community. These are public lands and the people of the Methow Valley want to have a voice in decisions that will directly impact our livelihoods and long-term engagement with this place we call home. To this end, the Methow Forest Forum and North Cascades Conservation Council have proposed reasonable, good faith alternatives that include focusing treatments on areas immediately around houses and paying logging companies a flat fee rather than letting them pay themselves based on how many trees they cut. And there should be no cutting of larger trees under any circumstances and no new roads should be built. It's time to pull this project and work with the community to find better, more sane, solutions to the issues we are all concerned about.