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Comments: Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the National Old Growth Amendment draft Environmental Impact Statement.

As a person who grew up hiking in the old growth forests of Oregon, it is painful to me to see how much old growth forest, in fact, almost all of it, has disappeared such that children today may not even know what it is! My life profession was as a mycologist (someone who studies fungi) so I know how amazing and useful are the fungi in old growth forests.

The fungi in old-growth forests remain relatively unknown, yet this group of organisms is essential for the growth of trees and has contributed greatly to the health of humans. Fungi are the source of many of the pharmaceuticals that keep us alive today. These include the antibiotic penicillin as well as cephalosporins needed for organ transplants and lovastatin, a cholesterol lowering drug, and many others. Who knows what amazing fungi yielding useful pharmaceuticals are still residing in the remaining old growth within the United States?

Others will comment on the many species of mammals and birds that will be lost if old growth habitats disappear but there are many other kinds of species that will also become extinct if we allow loss of old growth forests. Some fungi only known from old growth forests are known as delimited in the PNW Forest Management Plan but many more exist there. Fungi and cryptic organisms such as nematodes and insects are small, invisible for most of their lives, yet are crucial for the existence of trees. Surely others have mentioned the dependence of trees on fungi as mycorrhizae, especially truffles and truffle-like fungi. These truffles are eaten by flying squirrels and flying squirrels are the main food source of spotted owls and small mammals. The interdependence of organisms in old growth forests has barely begun to be known.

Finally, I must mention that the value of fungi harvested in old growth forests in one year such as chanterelles and matsutake may sometimes exceed the board feet value of the cut timber. In Oaxaca, Mexico, the value of the fungi are widely recognized such that the forests are managed for production of fungi associated with the trees rather than for the trees as timber.

Let us have the foresight to allow future generations to discover the magic of old growth forests as well as the usefulness of the amazing variety of fungi that live there!