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Organization: MELT

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Comments: I am an 83-year-old leader of an organization called Montana Elders for a Livable Tomorrow (MELT) which is a group of concerned people from many walks of life. Our mission is "to leave to future generations a more livable world than the one we are on a path to creating." The warming climate and its impacts on ecosystems, flora and fauna diversity, and our role as stewards make the National Old Growth Amendment (NOGA) a document of major concern to us. Members below have signed on to this message.

Old-growth forests across the nation, if left untouched, are quite stable and protect a wide diversity of interdependent ecosystems and species. Wet forests like the Kootenai National Forest, which several MELT members recently visited, become drier and more flammable if logging, road building and other types of proactive management that interferes with their natural development. By removing trees and undergrowth, the soil is exposed to sunlight, causing it to heat up and dry out. Such human actions thus change the ecosystems, and the biodiversity that currently exists is threatened or destroyed.

The NOGA should be pro-forest, instead of pro-industry. In the NOGA we see nothing that protects forests from logging, "shelterwood" (read "clear-cutting") or timber sales. In fact, the "preferred alternative 2" as described in the document directly or indirectly supports these activities for financial purposes, even though logging is ultimately a money-losing endeavor. As for wildfire risks, old-growth forests have dealt with wildfires very well for centuries -- that's how they became old-growth forests.

Another reason to leave these forests intact is the role they play in combating global warming. The forests sequester huge amounts of carbon dioxide (CO₂) both above and below ground. Forestry itself is second to forest fires in releasing CO₂ through its machinery and timber processing. We are aware that as our planet warms, we must do all we can to promote CO₂ sequestration. Any activity that restricts our ability to do so puts all of us at greater risk.

The NOGA as it stands today is dangerous to the forests, to the planet and to us. It is not well-informed and does not reflect a serious dive into the best available science (from ecological literature, universities and scientific journals). As we read it, the most evident source of information is from the industry that hopes to exploit these forests for personal gain. There is so much yet to be learned about how these forests function, but under NOGA there are no effective protections. We can't re-build something that took centuries or millennia to develop. Once these forests are gone, they are gone.

What this document should pursue is the least-invasive approach to old growth AND mature forests. The concept of climate refugia should be seriously considered -- leaving selected forests entirely untouched and protected so that future generations can visit them and see what existed long before their time.

Jan Hoem, Missoula

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