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Comments: Old Growth Forests are ancient, mature forests that have developed over long periods without significant disturbance from human activities like logging. These forests are essential for several reasons:

1. Old growth forests support a wide range of plant and animal species, some of which can only thrive in the specific conditions found in mature ecosystems. They provide critical habitat for wildlife, including rare and endangered species. These forests store significant amounts of carbon in their biomass and soil, making them vital in combating climate change by acting as carbon sinks.
2. The complex root systems of old growth trees help regulate water flow, reducing the risk of floods and maintaining water quality. The rich layers of organic material on the forest floor, built up over centuries, promote soil fertility and stability. Many old growth forests are culturally important to Indigenous communities, providing resources and spiritual significance. These forests often contain centuries-old trees and landscapes, serving as a living record of natural history.
3. The Nantahala and Pisgah National Forests make up nearly 1.1 million acres in Western North Carolina. The Nantahala-Pisgah Forest Plan is a comprehensive management strategy by the U.S. Forest Service to guide the use and conservation of these forests for the next 15-20 years. Its importance to the region stems from several key aspects:
  4. The plan seeks to balance recreational, commercial, and ecological interests. Western North Carolina relies heavily on these forests for tourism, recreation (hiking, fishing, camping), and logging, while also recognizing the need for environmental stewardship. The forests contain diverse ecosystems, ranging from old growth stands to rare habitats. The forest plan includes measures to protect threatened and endangered species, ensuring the preservation of biodiversity.
  5. The plan outlines logging guidelines aimed at promoting sustainable forest management. This is vital for maintaining the health of the forest while also supporting the local economy. These forests play a crucial role in protecting the watersheds of Western North Carolina, ensuring clean drinking water and mitigating the effects of climate change through forest conservation. The plan emphasizes collaboration with local communities, Indigenous groups, and stakeholders. This is important in a region where people's livelihoods are deeply connected to the forests.
5. In summary, old growth forests are crucial for ecological balance and climate resilience, and the Nantahala-Pisgah Forest Plan aims to protect these benefits while supporting the local economy and recreation in Western North Carolina.

Regards,

Chase Boone