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Comments: Hello,

I am writing to express my concerns about the proposed Lower North South Vegetation Management Project in the Pike-San Isabel National Forest, encompassing over 116,000 acres, including 18,500 acres within protected Colorado Roadless Areas. Having hiked part of the area in May, I witnessed the ecosystem's natural beauty and diverse habitats, which would be deeply impacted by such a large-scale logging project.

This proposal raises significant environmental, ecological, and community concerns:

1. Impacts on Endangered and Threatened Species: The proposed clearcuts and road construction will disrupt critical habitats of endangered and threatened species, including the Mexican spotted owl, Pawnee montane skipper, Preble's meadow jumping mouse, and Canada lynx. Colorado's unique ecosystems support these vulnerable species, and their preservation should remain a high priority.
2. Potential for Invasive Species and Fire Spread: Research has shown that large-scale logging can inadvertently increase fire risks by leaving behind easily ignitable materials and by introducing invasive weeds, which thrive on disturbed land. Peer-reviewed studies suggest that "fuel reduction" logging may, in fact, make fires more likely to spread and ignite quickly, potentially increasing fire risks instead of reducing them.
3. Impact on Old-Growth Forests and Ecological Integrity: Cutting old-growth forests diminishes biodiversity and disrupts ecosystem functions essential to resilience and long-term ecological stability. Lodgepole pine and spruce-fir forests, often targeted in logging operations, are ecological types that burn infrequently and thus may not warrant such extensive treatment.

This project represents a vast ecological tradeoff that could carry substantial costs to both local ecosystems and the surrounding communities, while consuming significant taxpayer resources. I urge the Forest Service to reconsider or halt this experimental and potentially damaging proposal, as the risks appear to outweigh any purported benefits.

Thank you for considering these comments, and I hope the Forest Service will prioritize conservation and the protection of Colorado's unique forest ecosystems.