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Comments: This letter presents my comments on the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) for the Northwest Forest Plan (NWFP) Amendment. The U.S. Forest Service must approve a forward-thinking, ecologically sound, and socially just regional plan to address the intersecting crises of climate change, wildfire activity, biodiversity loss, and decades of mismanagement. The following key issues must be included in the Final EIS and decision document for the amended NWFP:

TRIBAL SOVEREIGNTY

The National Forests covered by the NWFP are the ancestral lands of over 80 Tribes and Indigenous communities, whose land stewardship practices have long supported ecological diversity. The forced displacement of Native peoples and the criminalization of their stewardship practices have caused irreparable harm to the biodiversity of national forests.

Indigenous co-stewardship is critical to restoring habitat and resilience to these lands. The Forest Service must uphold Tribal sovereignty, honor treaty rights, and incorporate Indigenous co-stewardship programs and projects into the NWFP amendment as a moral imperative.

ECOLOGICAL FIRE MANAGEMENT

Fires ignited by lightning and Indigenous cultural burning have long played a vital role in shaping and maintaining the health of national forests. The Forest Service's fire exclusion and wildfire suppression policies have caused significant harm to fire-dependent species, both plant and animal.

To restore wildfire resilience and ecological health, the Forest Service must authorize prescribed fire, cultural burning practices, and managed wildfires for ecological benefit across the landscape in the NWFP amendment.

OLD-GROWTH FORESTS

The original NWFP was designed to protect old-growth forest ecosystems from industrial clearcutting. The idea that large, ancient trees can be protected through logging is nonsensical. The only effective means of maintaining resilience in old-growth forests has been Indigenous cultural burning. Tribal inclusion must extend to fire management, as the health and resilience of old-growth forests depend on the frequent, low-intensity burns practiced by Indigenous communities for millennia.

In conclusion, the Forest Service must authorize Cultural Burning in the NWFP amendment to ensure the preservation and health of these forests for future generations.