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Comments: I am writing to urge the USFS to strengthen, NOT weaken, the Northwest Forest Plan.

The Northwest Forest Plan (NWFP) is the landmark policy that has helped safeguard the Pacific Northwest's iconic old-growth forests, clean water, and wildlife habitat for 30 years. If The U.S. Forest Service (USFS) proposed amendment is enacted, these changes would double or even triple logging levels across our public forests, open mature and old-growth trees to chainsaws, and sideline the protections that communities, wildlife, and ecosystems depend on.

This is not a future we can afford. Recklessly logging these forests will exacerbate climate change, degrade habitat for imperiled species like the northern spotted owl and coho salmon, and increase wildfire risks in our communities. It also threatens clean drinking water and beloved recreation areas across the Pacific Northwest.

The amendment would:

- Open over 800,000 acres of mature and older forests to destructive commercial logging, and create new loopholes to allow logging in reserves meant to protect fish, wildlife, and drinking water.

- Permanently lock existing mature forest stands out of potential protection, severely limiting recruitment of old growth to replace what will naturally be lost to disturbance over time.

- Increase logging and turn mature forests, one of our most powerful climate solutions, into a source of additional carbon emissions that will exacerbate climate change.

- Fail to offer any measures to ensure protection of crucial habitat for spotted owls and murrelets. As proposed, the amendment will delay or prevent recovery of the spotted owl.

- Exploit the fear of fire to increase logging of mature forests that are already fire-resistant and resilient.

If enacted, these changes could create a dangerous precedent for mature and old-growth forest management plans across the nation. Rather than their proposed amendments, the Northwest Forest Plan should instead expand protections for the network of forest reserves to recruit habitat needed by imperiled species, protect streamside habitat that provides cool, clean water supplies for communities and salmon, and ensure these forests continue to achieve their potential as carbon sinks that help mitigate climate change. These goals can all be achieved by protecting mature and old-growth forests from logging while supporting Tribal sovereignty and environmental justice.

Any components to a NWFP amendment that weaken core protections for mature and old-growth forests and the suite of water quality, species habitat, and carbon storage values they provide should not move forward, while those components that strengthen the NWFP's commitment to Tribal sovereignty and inclusion, environmental justice, and beneficial fire use should move forward without being tied to increased logging in these vital forests.