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Comments: Old-growth forests play a critical and often overlooked role in maintaining the health of our national parks. They support wildlife, improve water quality, mitigate climate change by holding vast amounts of carbon and help protect larger ecosystems. As the climate crisis is threatening our national parks, which warm at twice the rate of the rest of the country, old-growth forests are increasingly important to the health of our national parks.

Forests help maintain and protect sources of drinking water - and old-growth trees play a crucial role in maintaining water quality. Their root systems filter water and stabilize river channels, preventing erosion and keeping water clean. Old-growth forests also slow runoff and hold water in the soil, helping to reduce the rate of flooding.

I am writing to urge your support for strengthening the Northwest Forest Plan by increasing the protections it provides for mature and old-growth forests. The Northwest Forest Plan is an effective policy that is helping to address climate change and providing additional habitat needed to recover the threatened Northern Spotted Owl and Marbled Murrelet.

Please strengthen the Northwest Forest Plan, and build upon the conservation gains made in the Pacific Northwest and northern California, by prioritizing enhanced protections for the region's mature and old-growth forests. This will benefit endangered birds, as well as the global climate.

This can be accomplished by adopting a modified version of Alternative C that provides added protection for mature forests essential to restore sufficient habitat. Increased buffers for forest management activities around Marbled Murrelet nests are also crucial to reducing nest predation, a key factor preventing population recovery.

I am concerned about language in all of the alternatives promoting increased logging of mature forests. These mature forests are essential for increasing the amount of old growth habitat and must not be sacrificed.

This plan also fails to address the extinction risk facing the Northern Spotted Owl, which is suffering from a severe and rapid population decline, as well as the slower decline of the Marbled Murrelet population. It is essential the existing habitat protections of the Northwest Forest Plan be maintained and built upon, not weakened or watered down.

Thank you for considering these critical issues. Please protect mature and old-growth forests to preserve biodiversity, fight climate change, and ensure the recovery of vulnerable bird species.

Signed,

Jan Hughes

No Titles