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Comments: I am a resident of Colorado, and a lifelong recreational user of public lands. I am submitting this comment to be included in the public record relating to changes outlined in the proposed Northwest Forest Plan Amendment.

My understanding is that the Forest Service draft environmental impact statement (DEIS) proposes to overhaul the highly successful Northwest Forest Plan (NWFP) by increasing logging on federal lands across the Pacific Northwest in the name of fighting wildfires and boosting rural economies. According to the DEIS, the proposed NWFP Amendment would result in increased annual timber harvests of at least 33% and potentially more than 200%. While this would potentially increase timber-related jobs, taxpayer-subsidized wildfire-mitigation logging is only economically sustainable by being propped up by government subsidies.

But the real issue is that the proposals included in the amendment would undo positive proven outcomes for the health of the forest and the economic health of the communities around them. In August 2023, a team of scientists with the U.S. Geological Survey, the Forest Service, and Oregon State University published a report based on over a quarter-century of data collection at more than 1,000 sites in 219 watersheds protected under the NWFP. This report documents "steady improvements in watershed condition" resulting from "broad-scale forest recovery combined with targeted forest, road, and stream management under the Northwest Forest Plan."

The NWFP has helped restore damage done by decades of unsustainable logging - protecting drinking water, keeping wildlife species off the endangered species list, restoring salmon runs, and improving quality of life and outdoor recreation, which provides the basis of a growing regional economy. A quick review of maps of old growth - or even healthy second or third growth - forests from 1950 to the present illustrates a stark reduction in natural forest cover within the region covered by the NWFP. Removing trees from a healthy forest in the name of somehow making it healthier flies in the face of logic, and such practice has been proven to reduce the health and fire-resistance of natural forest communities.

It is time that we stop the knee-jerk tit-for-tat practice of undoing legislation that was adopted during the administration of the "opposite" political party. We are one nation, one people who will prosper and flourish under policies that make sense and are based on verifiable data, time-tested research, and sound science.

The Forest Service must maintain and enhance the protections of the Northwest Forest Plan. If the agency's proposed amendment does not keep current protections and protect climate-buffering forests, it should not go forward.

Thank you in advance for taking the time to consider this input with regard to proposed amendments to the Northwest Forest Plan.

Joseph Fretz