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Title: President

Comments: Dear U.S. Forest Service Planning Team,

I am submitting my formal comment on the proposed Northwest Forest Plan Amendment, specifically in strong support of Alternative D. I believe that active forest management is the only viable path forward to restore forest health, prevent catastrophic wildfires, support local economies, and ensure ongoing access for work and recreation.

The 1994 Northwest Forest Plan (NWFP) failed to deliver on its promises and instead resulted in overgrown forests, devastating wildfires, and the economic collapse of rural communities that had relied on responsible timber management. The proposed 2024 NWFP amendment seems to continue this failed approach, prioritizing restrictions and preservation over practical, science-based forest management.

1. The Importance of Active Forest Management

Alternative D takes the most proactive approach to wildfire prevention and sustainable forest use. Since the 1994 NWFP was enacted, we have seen:

- *An explosion of overstocked, fuel-laden forests, leading to increasingly large and uncontrollable wildfires.
- *The near-total collapse of rural economies dependent on timber and forest-related industries.
- *A massive reduction in public access to forests, impacting recreational opportunities and local businesses that rely on outdoor tourism.

Alternative D would reverse these trends by implementing:

- *Thinning, selective logging, and controlled burns to reduce excessive fuel loads.
- *Increased timber harvesting at sustainable levels, improving economic stability.
- *A commitment to replanting after fire, disease, or insect infestations, ensuring continuous carbon capture and future forest growth.

The U.S. Forest Service is responsible for ensuring that public lands remain productive, accessible, and ecologically balanced-not abandoned to neglect and destruction.

2. Economic Benefits & Job Creation

Alternative D prioritizes economic stability by increasing sustainable timber production. In the 30 years since the 1994 NWFP was implemented, rural communities have been economically devastated due to mill closures, loss of forestry jobs, and restrictions on responsible land use.

Logging, when done properly, is a renewable resource that contributes to local economies while maintaining forest health. Alternative D ensures:

- *More steady employment for loggers, mill workers, equipment operators, and forestry professionals.
- *Increased funding for rural infrastructure, including road maintenance and fire prevention measures.
- *A predictable timber supply, supporting long-term economic investment in forestry-dependent communities.

3. The Role of Recreation & Public Access in Local Economies

Recreational access to public lands is not just a luxury-it is a necessity for many rural economies. The 1994 NWFP and its restrictive policies have turned once-thriving communities into ghost towns by closing roads, limiting access, and prioritizing "preservation" over responsible multi-use management.

Alternative D would protect and expand public access by:

- *Keeping roads and trails open for all forest users, including off-roaders, campers, hunters, and hikers.
- *Ensuring fire and emergency crews have unrestricted access to all areas of the forest.
- *Allowing motorized access for the disabled, elderly, and those who rely on vehicles to experience the outdoors.

The Forest Service must acknowledge that outdoor recreation-especially motorized recreation-is a critical driver of local economies, supporting restaurants, gas stations, hotels, repair shops, and guide services.

4. Balanced Conservation & Responsible Stewardship

Alternative D does not advocate for reckless logging or the destruction of old-growth forests. It supports:

- *The protection of truly old-growth stands (200+ years old) while allowing for responsible harvesting of younger trees.

*Removing dead and dying trees immediately to prevent further disease spread and reduce wildfire risks.

*Using mechanical thinning, grazing, and replanting as alternatives to large-scale prescribed burns, which have been overused and contribute to air pollution and habitat destruction.

It is irresponsible to let millions of acres of forest burn every year under the guise of "natural processes." This approach does not protect wildlife-it kills it. We have seen entire ecosystems wiped out due to catastrophic fires that could have been prevented through active management.

5. The Failures of the 1994 NWFP & the Need for Change

The original NWFP claimed it would save the Northern Spotted Owl (NSO) and protect biodiversity, yet:

*The NSO population has continued to decline despite millions of acres of land being set aside as habitat.

*Barred owls (a non-native, invasive species) continue to outcompete the NSO, proving that land preservation alone is not a viable solution.

*Wildfires have destroyed more old-growth habitat than logging ever did, negating the intended benefits of the plan.

The 1994 NWFP failed, and the current amendment does nothing to correct its fundamental issues. Instead of repeating the same mistakes, we must take an approach that includes active management, sustainable timber harvesting, and responsible access for all user groups.

6. The Role of the Forest Service & the Public's Right to Access

The Forest Service does not own these lands. These forests belong to the American people.

For decades, restrictive policies have:

*Blocked access to roads and trails previously open to the public.

*Stifled industries that once thrived under responsible forestry practices.

*Allowed lawsuits and activist-driven policies to override common-sense management.

It is time for the Forest Service to prioritize the needs of all forest users-not just special interest groups that seek to close public lands under the guise of conservation. Alternative D is the only option that restores balance to our forests while supporting those who live, work, and recreate in them.

7. Conclusion: Support for Alternative D

I strongly urge the U.S. Forest Service to adopt Alternative D as the foundation for the revised NWFP. This option provides:

*Sustainable forest management that reduces wildfire risks.

*Economic stability for rural communities.

*Expanded access for recreation and public land use.

*Balanced conservation efforts that protect both wildlife and timber resources.

For 30 years, we have watched the effects of failed policies devastate our forests and communities. It is time for the Forest Service to make real changes that support the health of our forests and the people who depend on them.

Stop closing roads. Stop restricting access. Stop letting our forests burn.

Adopt Alternative D and commit to active management, sustainable forestry, and responsible access for all users.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Jeff Holland

President Willamette Valley Wheelers