

Data Submitted (UTC 11): 3/15/2025 6:15:26 PM

First name: Heather

Last name: Ikeler

Organization:

Title:

Comments:

To: Regional Foresters Jacque Buchanan and Jennifer Eberlien

My name is Heather Ikeler and I volunteer with 350pdx, a Climate Justice organization in Portland Oregon. As an Oregonian I've been visiting our National Forests for over 50 years. I have a deep love and appreciation for our region's public lands and in particular the Mt Hood, Gifford Pinchot and Deschutes National Forests. Camping on the Salmon River near Welches Oregon is something I look forward to every summer. A place this wild and pristine so close to my urban home is an extraordinary blessing made even more significant to me personally because it was a favorite fishing spot of a dear friend who passed away several years ago.

Panther Creek Campground has been a favorite place to gather with friends for years and I've enjoyed many adventures exploring and hiking in the Mt Adams Ranger District. The Camp Sherman area of the Metolius River is where I have spent the most number of nights sleeping on the ground in my tent so far this lifetime. The Head of the Metolius, the river downstream and the surrounding forest is as close to a perfect place as I have found.

Please accept this comment on the draft EIS for the proposed Northwest Forest Plan amendment. These forests are important to me not only for recreation and renewal but because of what they do to support life in terms of clean water, wildlife habitat and, perhaps most importantly in 2025 and into the future, carbon storage and sequestration. The temperate forests of the Pacific Northwest are among the most valuable in the world, acre for acre, when it comes to reducing carbon in the atmosphere which in turn mitigates climate impacts and chaos.

The Northwest Forest Plan continues to be instrumental in keeping the Pacific Northwest a special place through the restoration of forests and watersheds damaged by irresponsible past logging and road building, recovery of economically and ecologically valuable salmon runs, protection of wildlife habitat and old-growth forests, and ensuring our National Forests are part of a natural climate solution.

I am concerned that the Forest Service's proposed amendment to the Plan weakens protections for our region's forests, clean water, and wildlife habitat. If 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.

I support some elements of the amendment that includes a beneficial fire approach and support of Indigenous cultural burning and co-stewardship agreements. The Forest Service should retain all of the Tribal inclusion plan components that are in Alternative B, but uncouple them from the forest management components that increase the age of trees and forests that can be logged.

Preserving biodiversity and connected wildlife habitat across the region should be a core principle of this forest plan amendment. This includes not only threatened species, but others that have been impacted by the loss and fragmentation of their habitat, and those awaiting state and/or federal Endangered Species Act listing decisions.

The amendment should recognize the wide variety of social and economic benefits National Forests provide for local communities and the region as a whole - not just timber, but also clean water, climate stability, quality of life, and outdoor recreation.

Fire resistance and resilience can be bolstered by preserving and restoring mature and old-growth forests. Fuels

and fire management should focus on the home ignition zone and on non-commercial treatments and beneficial fire use, not commercial logging. Indigenous cultural burning and wildland fire use should be prioritized. Commercial logging for fuel reduction can negatively impact wildlife habitat, remove large fire-resistant trees, introduce invasive species, and create hazardous fire conditions. Standards must ensure that fuel reduction is both needed and effective before logging is allowed.

The Forest Service must reject plans to weaken core protections of the Northwest Forest Plan, and do the following:

- * Strengthen protections for mature and old-growth forests to ensure habitat, water quality, and carbon storage, and recruit more mature and old forests to restore a functional ecosystem.
- * Maintain or expand protections for the network of forest reserves to allow natural processes to flourish, ensure connectivity for wildlife, and support the recovery of imperiled species. Any reduction in forest reserve protections would increase harmful impacts such as habitat destruction, sediment in streams, and carbon loss, further endangering sensitive ecosystems.
- * Genuinely consult with Tribes, respect their sovereignty, and provide resources to support their full participation in decision-making. The Forest Service must support co-stewardship agreements, cultural burning practices, first food harvesting, and youth education while ensuring equitable access to planning processes. Pairing these components with the Forest Service's plan for weakened environmental protections is a false choice manufactured by the agency.
- * Address environmental justice by analyzing impacts on air, water, and communities and ensuring fair, sustainable working conditions.
- * Shift wildfire strategies to prioritize community safety and proven prevention measures over logging.

I believe we need a strong forest plan that incorporates modern science and public values, robust and honest tribal consultation, and the needs of future generations.

Thank you for your consideration.

Heather Ikeler
Portland, Oregon