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Title:

Comments: I work with Climate Writers, a Eugene-Crow-Elmira group that gets together monthly to write letters on climate-related topics. Various people on our group have been writing letters about NWFP Amendments for months. We got the mailing address from government internet sites: 333 SW First Avenue/ P.O.Box 3623 Portland 97208-3623.

I was startled when people in our group told me that their letters were being returned as undeliverable. I said I would look into it, and I began calling the Forest Service in Portland the same day, last Friday morning, March 7. I was on the phone quite awhile, talking, leaving messages for, or being referred to Eric, Cathy, Yanna, Audrey, Susanna, Jackie Gross, and Ryan.

Later in the day I got a call from Shasta Ferranto in Washington D.C., who said the person I needed to talk with was on leave but she, Shasta, could talk with me. She was polite and helpful, and she explained that the Forest Service had gotten their first phone call about an undeliverable letter the day before, March 6. The correct address, which I had never heard before, was/is USDA Forest Service, 1220 SW Third Avenue, Suite G015, Portland, OR 97204. The other addresses were expired addresses. It had been long enough since they were used that mail could no longer be forwarded from them. I heard later that the First Street address hadn't been used in at least ten years.

The Forest Service has now sent a letter correcting the mistake to people on their NWFP mailing list.

I don't know how this mistake could have happened and gone unnoticed for so long. I understand that the Forest Service strongly prefers online comments, but when people are working in a group, writing letters by hand, that isn't an option. And because the online comment box is so small, some people are reluctant to begin writing their letter online for fear they will run out of room. I know now, from Shasta's research and explanation, that there is no limit to how long comments can be, but it would be a good idea to state that next to the online box.

So for various reasons, many people may have used the surface mail option. There's no way to know how many. When some people get their letters back, they may give up. Other people may get the correction email from the Forest Service but feel discouraged. I don't know how long it takes the post office to return undeliverable mail, and people may get their letters back after the March 17 deadline for submitting comments. Some people will get the Forest Service correction email and mail their letters again to the correct address, but they may be a minority.

This confusion has made the comment process deeply flawed.