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Comments: Strengthen, Do Not Weaken, the NWFP

I am writing to express the need for the Forest Service to strengthen the Northwest Forest Plan (NWFP). The most recent Forest Service proposal to weaken the NWFP would damage the protections that communities, wildlife, and ecosystems depend on. Recklessly logging these forests will exacerbate climate change, degrade habitat for imperiled species like the northern spotted owl and coho salmon, and increase wildfire risks in our communities. It also threatens clean drinking water and popular recreation areas across the Pacific Northwest.

Instead, the Forest Service must expand protections for the network of forest reserves to recruit habitat needed by imperiled species, protect streamside habitat that provides cool, clean water supplies for communities and salmon, and ensure these forests continue to achieve their potential as carbon sinks that help mitigate climate change. These goals can all be achieved by protecting mature and old-growth forests from logging while supporting Tribal sovereignty and environmental justice.

Protecting mature and old-growth trees and forests is essential for confronting both the climate and extinction crises. The temperate rainforest region of the Pacific Northwest stores more carbon per acre than the Amazon. The co-benefits of protecting mature and old-growth trees and forests from the threat of logging include:

1. storing and sequestering atmospheric carbon for long periods of time
2. safeguarding biodiversity and being climate refugia
3. reducing flood and erosion risk as precipitation patterns change
4. increasing availability of drinking water for communities struggling with drought impacts
5. possessing features that are more resistant to fire.

The Forest Service must also recognize and incorporate wet and rainforest life zones, coupled with Plant Association Zones and Mean Annual Increment metrics into a revised set of mapped forest management zones, while reviewing ecological assessments of past forest removals from the SNF and all national forests. Furthermore, fire resistance, not resilience, must be the goal of forest management in the Siuslaw National Forest. Home hardening, not forest fuel reduction is the path to human community resilience.

World class sequestration of atmospheric CO2 is a natural outcome of proper forest stewardship when managing for wildfire resistance and ecosystem integrity. This is especially true for the Siuslaw National Forest.