

Data Submitted (UTC 11): 3/17/2025 6:08:27 PM

First name: Lydia

Last name: Mejia-Mitzner

Organization:

Title:

Comments: This letter includes my comments on the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) for the Northwest Forest Plan (NWFP) Amendment. The U.S. Forest Service needs to approve a forward-looking, ecologically-sound, and socially-just regional plan to address the multiple intersecting crises involving climate change, wildfire activity, biological diversity, and watershed stability. The following key issues need to be included in the Final EIS and decision document for the amended NWFP:

#### TRIBAL SOVEREIGNTY

The National Forests within the NWFP are the homelands of over 80 Tribes and other Indigenous communities. Their land stewardship practices helped sustain native biodiversity. The forced removal of Native peoples and criminalization of their stewardship practices has resulted in losses of wildlife habitat and impacts to native prairies and forest meadows in national forests. Indigenous co-stewardship is necessary to protect old-growth forests and restore biodiversity in national forests. As a matter of environmental justice the Forest Service must respect Tribal sovereignty, honor treaty rights, and authorize Indigenous co-stewardship programs and projects in the NWFP amendment.

#### ECOLOGICAL FIRE MANAGEMENT

Fires from lightning ignitions and Indigenous cultural burning helped shape and maintain much of the landscape of national forests. The Forest Service's fire exclusion and wildfire suppression policies have caused widespread harm to old-growth forests and the communities that depend on them. I have worked the last 3 summers at a resort in the Deschutes National Forest, and I plan on working there for many summers to come. Not a single summer has gone by without the threat of wildfire destroying the resort that I work at. The first summer we were evacuated due to a nearby forest fire, ending our work season early which resulted in the entire staff losing out on months of work. Every year firefighters come in from all over the country to help put out these fires. We need all the help we can get, and we have indigenous communities right here that want to help with fire management. Wildfire resilience and ecological sustainability can best be restored through the careful, intentional use of beneficial fire. The Forest Service must authorize prescribed fire, Indigenous cultural burning, and managed wildfires for ecological benefits across broad landscapes in the NWFP amendment.

#### OLD-GROWTH FORESTS

The current NWFP was created mainly to protect old-growth forest ecosystems from industrial clearcutting. The notion that big, old trees are protected by cutting them down is destructive! The only proven means of humans actively managing and maintaining resilience in old-growth forest has been through Indigenous cultural burning. Tribal inclusion requires fire inclusion, and old-growth forest resilience requires ecological fire management.

In conclusion, the Forest Service must authorize Indigenous co-stewardship of the land in the NWFP amendment for the sake of future generations.