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Organization:

Title:

Comments:

Dear Regional Foresters Jacqueline Buchanan and Jennifer Eberlien,

My name is Nicolaas Westarp, and I am submitting my comment as a public health student at Oregon State University, and lifelong Portland resident. I am writing because I am alarmed by the proposed amendment alternatives to the Northwest Forest Plan, which would dramatically increase commercial logging across the Northwest.

The Pacific Northwest is experiencing a climate and biodiversity crisis, which has direct effects on human health. Each year, the effects become more intense: extreme heat waves are taking lives during our summers, novel infectious diseases are evolving and becoming more likely to spread to humans, and food security is becoming increasingly unstable. These effects cause great stress to our already strained healthcare system.

As we face these realities, one of the best ways we can protect human health and slow climate change is to implement rigorous protection of our remaining complex and mature forests. The benefits of these forests cannot be overstated: they slow climate change by sequestering vast amounts of carbon, reduce the spread of disease by increasing biodiversity, and recreation in these forests has well-proven physical and mental health benefits. These health benefits are particularly significant for indigenous groups, who have a unique relationship with our forests and face notable health inequities in our state.

It is because of this that I am appalled by the proposed changes included in the USFS' 3 amendment alternatives for the NWFP: alternatives B, C, and D all include changes that would increase aggressive commercial logging in mature forests, such as weakening protections in late-successional reserves, raising the qualifying age of protected trees from 80 to 120 years, and vowing to log 964,000 acres of dry forest, among other changes. This escalation of logging would greatly accelerate climate change and undermine all of the health benefits of our forests, with disastrous consequences for Oregon public health.

The Northwest Forest Plan certainly needs to be updated- in particular, I commend the Forest Service for the proposals to increase tribal inclusion. However, it would be shamefully performative and insincere on the Forest Service's part to implement these tribal projects while simultaneously rolling back ecosystem and species protection. If the Forest Service truly believes in its mission to "sustain the health, diversity, and productivity of the nation's forests and grasslands to meet the needs of present and future generations," it must strengthen protections of mature forests, not weaken them. The health of all Oregonians depends on it.

I urge the Forest Service to reconsider its proposals for the NWFP, to strengthen protections for mature and complex forests, and to collaborate sincerely with tribal groups in our state.

Please think of present and future generations who will experience the results of our environmental policy.

Sincerely,

Nicolaas Westarp