

Data Submitted (UTC 11): 3/17/2025 11:05:03 PM

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Comments: RE: The Northwest Forest Plan potential changes

I am a botanist who in the 1990s had forestry colleagues and academics peers who sat at the 'round table' helping to formulate the compromise and balance foundation of what became the Northwest Forest Plan. The Northwest Forest Plan (NWFP) was a positive move forward in recognizing the very important values of conserving some mature and old-growth forests for clean water, fish and wildlife habitat, and yes, timber production. However, like any compromise, the NWFP lacked the real, on-the-ground, region by region, forest district-by-district protection of our most mature trees and forests. Watersheds or imperiled species of plants and animals that fell into matrix lands (devoted to timber production) were not protected. Over the years the NWFP land-use designations became blurred; Late Successional Reserves (LSRs) or Riparian habitats were not given the protections outlined in the NWFP when it came to some timber sale units on the landscape. Some Forest Service districts adhered to the NWFP land designations more closely, offering options in their Draft Environmental Impact Statements (DEIS) that did conserve clean water, habitat and wildlife. Other Districts stretched the limits and laws with every timber sale.

The dangerous precedent of continued logging of our nation's remaining oldest forests- has already been set in motion by still allowing harvest of old growth trees. In the Western U.S. these old growth harvests occur by timber sales using the Forest Service's own prescribed "silvicultural or forest treatments." Logging of old growth and very mature trees keeps happening under various types of harvest prescriptions in many timber sale units.

These forest lands with mature trees often provide key habitat corridors, or were supposed to be previously set aside for their roadless area, wildlife, botanical and riparian habitats, or clean water and fish populations. Some were conserved as Late Successional Reserves (LSRs) that include some of the nation's last older forests. (Some were supposed to be conserved Bureau of Land Management (BLM) forests.) These mature forest lands--some which had already been reduced to literal islands of biodiversity, surrounded by past immense clearcuts--need immediate protection---not harvesting for timber production, even under the guise of fire resilience. Think the Willamette National Forest, think Middle Santiam area of Oregon.

Although not perfect, the NWFP at least has had an important methodology of how the Forest Service scientists and timber targets must be studied and mesh when harvests are planned.

Here in the U.S., we already have plenty of land devoted to timber production; let's not mess with the small amount of remaining old growth template. We really shot ourselves in the foot during the rampant unsustainable levels of timber harvest in the past decades, shipping every fifth old growth log (and Jobs!)-overseas. Short-sighted and gross overharvest, supplying an international market out of our nation's beautiful NW forests and short-term profit for a few- off our public lands- has most certainly forfeited our future sustainable supply and local jobs.

Now we are in a bind, especially as we learn more about the tremendous value of forests in fighting climate change!

It's not just "hey we are impacting marbled murrelet or red tree vole, or salmon habitat" by harvesting certain forestlands, nowadays, it is impacting the globe in terms of carbon sink removal or increasing forest fire risk. Decades of scientific research and data have shown the multitude of other, long-term values of why we shouldn't be harvesting our nation's oldest forests and individual tree units and riparian areas. Protection of older mature trees and forests is not only about conserving habitat, species diversity, and watersheds. It is way beyond that--in terms of absorbing and storing carbon, and helping against climate change; we must look ahead and stop cutting all old growth trees. Research has clearly shown that the biggest old trees are not the trees to harvest from a timber sale unit for fire resilience either!

The Northwest Forest Plan -or any changes to it--must provide stronger protection for mature trees in all Riparian areas. Water quality and the role of mature forests are intertwined, and our future depends on protections put in place now.

We need to ensure conservation safeguards, not downgrade or gut them. The days of a Manifest Destiny approach and short-sighted overharvests is over. Our planet simply cannot afford to take massive steps backwards and ignore decades of science! Please don't throw it away to temporarily appease the Trump administration's foolhardy short-term "gain" approach to our public natural resources.