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Comments: Hello,

I appreciate the opportunity to comment on the Draft Environmental Assessment (EA) for the Forestwide Thinning Treatments Project (FWT) in the Mt Baker - Snoqualmie National Forest (MBSNF) that the U.S. Forest Service (FS) proposes. Before elaborating on my concerns about this proposal, I would first like to comment on what the Mt. Baker National Forest means to me personally. I grew up and live in the Skagit Valley, with many of my most cherished memories taking place in our local gem which is the Mt. Baker-Snoqualmie forest. I'm sure you can relate to the awe that landscape inspires, and the understanding of how unique the beauty of our home really is. I'm concerned that if we continue to encroach on the forest, we will damage not only that ecosystem, but create a negative trickle-down effect on waterways, recreation, and tourism. An EIS statement could explore the impact of the proposal on these topics and more, giving us a clearer image of what is to be gained, or lost, should the forest thinning take place.

The MBSNF is an "Emerald Gem" that is a key recreation destination, resource, and economic driver for all Washington State. See Gem of the Emerald Corridor: Nature's Value in the Mt. Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest, Earth Economics/The Wilderness Society, 2017, (<https://bit.ly/gemoftheemeraldcorridor>). The Emerald Gem Article touches on several areas the EA does not, especially the impact of non-timber production economies.

The FWT will likely have negative impacts on tourism and local communities' livelihoods as local and regional economies depend far more on tourism and recreation, as well as non-timber production jobs, than the timber jobs of the distant past.

The FWT will likely have negative impacts on Water quality. The Hydrology Report lists many watersheds in the MBS which might be impacted by the FWT. The MBS provides domestic water supplies to a number of communities, and the EA needs to adequately address the impact on domestic water sources.

Thinning projects also pressure threatened and endangered species and their habitats, like the Marbled Murrelet, Northern Spotted Owl, Canada Lynx, Wolverine, Bull Trout, and numerous flowers and plants. Federal law requires that these species be protected.

In addition, as noted in the EA, three designated "Wild and Scenic" rivers are in the MBSNF, as well as numerous rivers 'eligible' for designation, all of which need to be protected as listed by applicable law.

The EA also vaguely describes what should be specific and detailed actions. That is, the EA does not identify thinning units by location or acreage, and does not prioritize which annual thinning projects across the MBS, will occur where and when. These issues and more, including the problems mentioned above, can and should be addressed by an unbiased, neutral, and in-depth EIS.

The FWT should be broken into separate 10-year projects for each of the 4 Ranger Districts, for a total of four (4) projects. Dealing with smaller pieces of the MBSNF will make the scope of the project easier to understand, and will facilitate better understanding of specific impacts within particular locales. Smaller projects can also be managed more precisely by the Forest Service.

The potential significant impacts of the FWT demand an EIS. Please conduct an EIS. Thank you for considering these comments.

Sincerely,
A lifelong Bow resident, Skagit Valley