

Data Submitted (UTC 11): 1/13/2026 4:05:38 AM

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Organization:

Title:

Comments: I appreciate the opportunity to comment on the Forestwide Thinning Project #68852, impacting Mount Baker- Snoqualmie National Forest, a deeply beloved wilderness that is under increasing threat. I do not support this project as currently written and wish to submit the following for consideration:

I grew up here and have spent a lot of time hiking throughout the western side of the state and what I've been seeing unravel in our mountains and forests is deeply unsettling. With the rapid acceleration of climate change as evidenced by the severe drought, low snowpack, shrinking glaciers, and historically catastrophic rainfall in just this past year, the proposed 1,200 acres of commercial thinning per year, for 30 years, is short-sighted and doesn't account for this recent reality. A healthy and expansive tree canopy is still our number one defense against the consequences of burning excessive amounts of fossil fuels. The stated goal of "increasing" forest complexity in stands that are less than 80-years old has been framed as applying to tree plantations but there is no criteria established for second- or third-growth forests. Please provide a clear and definitive area proposed for thinning, as supported by GIS. This should be explicitly limited to replanted plantation stands, as implied but not clarified. Language and framework should be concise so there is zero ambiguity and accountability can be enforced. Project duration should be modified to account for a rapidly shifting climate. A comprehensive analysis that occurs more regularly, in incremental phases, allows adequate time to respond to ongoing shifts and impacts. Ideally, this would be based on best available science, related to forest fires specifically, as well as climate analysis and impact, especially as it pertains to net carbon effect.

The implication that "thinning" the stands will somehow reduce fire risk is preying on people's fear and doesn't acknowledge that the worst fires, such as Paradise, are more commonly due to wind. Mechanical thinning alone often increases fire spread because it results in more fine fuels on the ground, increases sun exposure to the forest floor, and allows greater penetration by wind through the open forest stands. By contrast, natural forests with higher density (i.e. those with complex diversity and the most fuels) do not burn well because they retain moisture the longest, wind is impeded from pushing the flames through, and thus should be protected within this project.

Additionally, road construction has also been attributed to increasing the risk of ignition and fire spread while also becoming a potential major source of sediment flow into waterways, thus negatively impacting fish populations. As such, any roads that are built should be done so at a healthy distance from riparian areas. At the very least, roadbuilding should be minimized to reduce potential for fire risk and include a mandate that no mechanical treatment should occur in areas that are presently not accessible to commercial equipment.

By the forest service's own admission, "forest thinning" has more to do with increasing timber sales. The average timber sale for MBS is approximately 10 million board feet per year, but this project would add a staggering 36 MMBF per year. This extraordinary increase will undoubtedly generate a significant increase in profit for the few, at the expense of the many. The health and well-being of our residents should take precedence over further enriching the timber industry.

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Susan Fedore