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Title:
Comments: Date: September 26, 2026
To: U.S. Forest Service
From: Deborah A. Ragland
Subject: Proposed Truchas to Upper Costilla Forest Thinning Project #377818

The U.S. Forest Service plan to aggressively thin Carson National Forest (and other forests) is fraught with problems. I have seen the McGaffey "thinned" area and was appalled. Pile upon pile of "harvested" trees lined the roads (this was after one company had already removed truckloads). Single trees stood stranded in fields of dying grass and bare soil. I know it makes little difference in what I say as you are set upon your course, but I must at least try to defend the forest ecology.

Firstly, you have disrupted entire forest ecosystems, plants and animals. Where are the deer and elk going to bed down and hide their young? How are the small animals supposed to sneak through the underbrush without predators finding them and attacking? How do squirrels jump from tree to tree when the trees are tens of feet apart? How do the ground birds like turkeys migrate safely across wide open expanses? Do the bears hide behind a single tree when they are hunting? You have effectively forced the faunal ecosystem to move out forcing their way into other areas of the forest and also, perhaps, closer to civilization where they are most often not welcome.

Second, as Ms. Berde pointed out, removing too many trees opens the landscape to intense solar radiation. The thin grasses that are left in McGaffey are drying and some of the soil is bare and completely exposed. The underbrush and the tree canopy protected the soil. The roots of the trees and underbrush stabilized the soil. Now what soil there is will be washed away in heavy rains taking what little undergrowth remains and exposing the tree roots. Then the few remaining trees die. This is not protecting our watersheds; the water needs to seep into the ground slowly protecting our aquifers in the mountains and populated areas.

Third, the enormous piles of logs still beside the forest roads are, as one of my colleagues pointed out, compacting the soils. Piles of logs are crushing the grasses in the once-beautiful McGaffey meadow (where grasses are supposed to be growing). It takes tens of years, hundreds of years to make good soils and forest soils are fragile. These severely compacted soils will now simply allow water to rush off, not filter in as they are meant to. And, if these piles of wood are left to decay without burial, more carbon dioxide will be released to the atmosphere.

Fourth, burn piles? Have we not learned? In addition to unattended burn piles starting forest fires, burning wood and other organic matter adds carbon dioxide to the atmosphere, hence increasing global warming. The only logical way to handle removal of some undergrowth is to chip and spread, using the remains as ground cover to protect the soils and eventually add organic matter. Prescribed burns are doing the same as burning the piles. You are making global warming worse.

Fifth, why did you remove all of the juvenile trees? When the older trees die (as they are now doing at a more rapid rate), what replaces those trees? I did not see a single small tree left between the widely separated remaining older trees.

Hand-cutting some undergrowth and mulching, removing dead trees, and minor thinning is the best solution. Is this labor-intensive? Yes. Does it employ people. Yes. And for a good cause. It preserves the forest in a much more natural state.

It seems like everyone has forgotten that trees are amazing contributors to the health of the planet. Remember your environmental science class? Trees emit oxygen to the atmosphere and absorb carbon dioxide. This near-clear-cutting of the forest is contributing to global warming that will lead to even warmer summers and less precipitation in our future. Our goal should be to reverse global warming as much as we can, not further contribute to the problem. Please revise your plan to denude the remaining forests and propose a new plan that helps maintain what remains of our beautiful Rocky Mountain forests.

Respectfully Submitted,
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