Dear Jessica,

I am writing about the proposed Environmental Assessment in the Indian Heaven Wilderness of the Gifford Pinchot National Forest. I am concerned that the treatments in the mature forest stands are too aggressive and a proposed timber harvest in over 3,000 acres of trees which are over 120 years old would reduce the canopy cover to below 50%. These legacy trees are needed to develop into old growth habitat.

I urge you to consider less aggressive thinning activities to maintain the canopy cover and retain the legacy forests that remain. These actions now will mitigate climate impacts in the years to come and maintain the health of the intact ecosystem now.

I am also urging you to not remove any old-growth forests or rare habitat areas and retain a no-cut buffer. The proposed cut allows some of the northern spotted owl habitats to be harvested; many of these parcels are proposed for thinning the canopy to 40% cover. This action to reduce the canopy cover would disturb the reproduction sites of the northern spotted owl and reduce the recovery of the highly threatened species. Much of the area has been included as critical habitat.

Furthermore, the targeted areas include Riparian Reserves which serve as wildlife migration corridors and refugia. I strongly urge you to leave these critical areas intact for the needs of the aquatic species.

I am also concerned about the Lost Creek area on the southwestern edge of the watershed. These ancient cedar trees retain the special uniqueness of the wilderness. Logging near this area will reduce the canopy cover, leading to increased temperatures, less moisture retention, and create a higher risk of wildfires. In future climate models, we will be faced with increased temperatures and less moisture, so it is in our best interest to use our mitigation strategies now to reduce the current and future impacts of climate change.

As a volunteer with the Forest Service, I have hiked and enjoyed the wildness of the Indian Heaven Wilderness and wish to maintain the wilderness characteristic of this area.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.

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