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JAN 11 2008

1056 Rio Glen Drive
Eugene, Oregon 97401
January 8, 2008

Bureau of Land Management
Western Oregon Plan Revisions
Office 333 SW 1st. Avenue
Portland, OR 97208

Dear Sirs and Madams:

I am writing in response to the BLM's proposal to increase logging of old growth forests on its lands in western Oregon. Although I am writing as a private citizen, I am an associate professor of Biology at the University of Oregon and have taught an upper division forest ecology course there for nearly twenty years. I have also done research on forest fire and forest health issues in the Pacific Northwest. In this time I have witnessed great changes in federal policy in the Pacific Northwest and have supported many of these changes. The Northwest Forest Plan of 1994 was a landmark plan in that it truly emphasized a regional and ecosystem view of forest ecology and forest management. It is sometimes hard for me to convince students today, who are just learning about these issues, how far we have come in understanding forests and in changing the way we manage public forest lands in western Oregon.

But the preferred alternative being proposed by the BLM is a throwback to the bad old days that views old-growth timber as a renewable commodity and falsely juxtaposes jobs and local economies with cutting of old forests. What we have learned in the fifteen years since Judge Dwyer ruled that federal agencies were violating the National Forest Management Act and changed the landscape literally and figuratively is that there are ways to log forests and protect the most valuable habitat at the same time. On the field trips I take with my forest biology students, we drive through miles and miles of 40 and 50 year old stands on public lands. We compare the ecology of these forests to that of 450 year old forests. Those differences are well established in the scientific literature and in the courts. What has become more evident is that thinning of these young stands can be a win-win-win proposition. It can provide timber and jobs, while having both immediate and long-term benefits on the landscape in terms of increasing habitat diversity, and promoting old-stand conditions.

It would be bad enough if this proposal was made with the scientific and public policy knowledge of the 1990's when ecosystem management became a concept that made sense to both the public and to federal land managers. But in the 21st century, we face new and important challenges that should provide an even greater reason to protect what old growth remains. Fire has become an ever more important issue. With more people living at the urban forest interface, and with fires burning increasing number of acres, despite immense and increasing federal spending to fight them, it is time to acknowledge that our past management practices have contributed to forest fires. I have taken my students through the 1988 Shady Beach fire for two decades. The young

plantations that burned in that (logging-related) fire burned hot and thoroughly. Where the fires approached 200 year old and older trees, it often dropped to the surface where it killed small trees but left many of the bigger ones. We know that we cannot control fires when climate conditions favor conflagrations, but forest conditions do have a major effect on how those fires affect the landscape, and older Douglas-fir forests are much more resilient to fire than are younger forests, at low and mid elevations, at least.

The second big change we face in the 21st century is climate change. Work by Gordon Grant and his colleagues is pointing up the complexities of changing streamflows as snowpacks are projected to lessen under warmer winter conditions. Especially hard hit will be western Cascade forests where streamflows will experience greater annual fluctuations. Old forests can help modulate those fluctuations. And according to Grant, forests in Lane and Douglas Counties will be especially important as water producing regions in the future.

In addition to the scientific and ecological reasons why the BLM's preferred alternative is unacceptable, I think that from a purely political perspective, this proposal, or a modification of it, if selected, would take us back twenty years to the era of intense public outcry regarding logging on public lands. I have only recently been able to convince a large number of the undergraduate students in my classes that federal land managers are not simply timber-industry minions, but are in fact using science to choose options that will allow for both logging and ecosystem services. Even students at the University of Oregon are willing to support logging of young stands. But if logging of old growth picks up again, I am afraid we will see the return of tree-sits, marches to the federal courthouse, and unproductive antagonism between the public and the agencies who are supposed to work in the public's interest. Admittedly, this will make teaching my forest biology class more interesting, but I do not believe it is in the best interest of the people of Lane County or of Oregon, or of the federal government.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Alan Dickman', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Alan Dickman, Ph.D.

cc Senators Ron Wyden, Gordon Smith, and Representative Peter DeFazio