

OUTDOOR ALLIANCE

November 7, 2023

Northwest Forest Plan FACA Committee
C/O John Dow
Forest Service NWFP FACA Coordinator
1220 SW 3rd Ave.
Portland, OR 97204

Via email: sm.fs.nwfp_faca@usda.gov

Re: Outdoor recreation and the Northwest Forest Plan revision

Dear NWFP FACA Committee members:

On behalf of the human-powered outdoor recreation community, thank you for your work to provide recommendations for amending the Northwest Forest Plan. The NWFP covers lands of superlative importance for every person in the Northwest, supporting spiritual and cultural values, clean water, wildlife habitat, forest products, and outdoor recreation. Outdoor recreation is the most common way in which residents of the Pacific Northwest come to know their public lands and waters and cultivate a sense of shared stewardship for their myriad values. We write to share a brief, high-level perspective on the importance of these landscapes to the outdoor recreation experience and the ways in which outdoor recreation can support strong communities and economic vibrancy.

Outdoor Alliance is a coalition of ten member-based organizations representing the human powered outdoor recreation community. The coalition includes Access Fund, American Canoe Association, American Whitewater, International Mountain Bicycling Association, Winter Wildlands Alliance, The Mountaineers, the American Alpine Club, the Mazamas, Colorado Mountain Club, and Surfrider Foundation and represents the interests of the millions of Americans who climb, paddle, mountain bike, backcountry ski and snowshoe, and enjoy coastal recreation on our nation's public lands, waters, and snowscapes.



OUTDOOR ALLIANCE

Outdoor recreation and the recreation economy in the Northwest Forest Plan area

The 24.5 million acres of the NWFP area provide a diversity of extremely high-quality outdoor recreation opportunities, from accessible frontcountry trail systems to wild rivers and rugged backcountry landscapes. These opportunities play a crucial role in supporting the health and well-being of people across the Northwest.

Outdoor Alliance maintains the most comprehensive—though necessarily incomplete—data set of human-powered outdoor recreation resources on public lands and waters, and within the planning area, there are more than:

- 873 river access points and 5,922 miles of whitewater paddling opportunities;
- 10,592 miles of hiking trails;
- 3,754 miles of biking trails; and
- 514 climbing sites.

These recreation amenities support a thriving outdoor recreation economy in the Pacific Northwest. Outdoor recreation accounts for 1.8 percent of state GDP in Washington, 2.4 percent in Oregon, and 1.6 percent in California according to the Bureau of Economic Analysis. From 2020 to 2021, outdoor recreation employment grew by 8.7 percent in Washington, 14 percent in Oregon, and 13.1 percent in California.

In addition to the direct benefits of the outdoor recreation economy, the area's compelling access to outdoor recreation helps attract employers and high-skill workers across a range of industries.

Conservation is key for supporting recreation values

The activities represented by Outdoor Alliance and our member organizations—climbing, paddling, mountain biking, skiing, surfing, hiking, and more—are defined by the opportunity to interact with unique and compelling natural environments and dependent upon the conservation and sound management of our public lands and waters.

OUTDOOR ALLIANCE

As the committee contemplates modernizing the Northwest Forest Plan, it is particularly worth noting the importance of the conservation of old growth and mature forests for the recreation experience. Mature and old growth forests support a wide range of critical ecosystem services and also provide spectacular settings for outdoor recreation activities across the plan area. Recreationists greatly appreciate recreating in and around older forests, and older forests are commonly cited as an important recreational value in guidebooks for climbing, mountain biking, paddling, hiking, skiing, and other recreational pursuits. Visiting these forests allows recreationists to gain a deeper understanding of the natural history of our public lands, which in turn helps members of our community develop a lasting stewardship ethic that can support forest conservation over time. Additionally, healthy forests are critically important for protecting the flow regimes and water quality for rivers across the plan area. Protecting these experiences for present and future generations is a high priority for the outdoor recreation community.

Climate change, injudicious logging, land conversion, high severity fire, insect and disease outbreaks, and other stressors all threaten the quality of the recreation experience across the Northwest and the numerous societal benefits outdoor recreation provides. Following a century or more of fire suppression and in the face of a changing climate, providing for ecologically sound fuel treatments is essential for restoring many northwest forests, particularly dryer forests, to a state of fire resiliency.

Additionally, the Northwest Forest Plan was unjustly developed without the input of the Indigenous Tribes who have stewarded the landscape since time immemorial, and it is essential that the federal government engage in robust government-to-government negotiations with Tribal nations to ensure that an amended plan reflects Tribes priorities for land and water stewardship.

* * *

An amended Northwest Forest Plan presents an opportunity to respond to contemporary challenges, address injustices, and also better incorporate recreation to support economic development and quality of life and find mutually reinforcing



OUTDOOR ALLIANCE

opportunities to support both recreation and conservation. We look forward to supporting the FACA committee in its work and supporting the development of a strong amendment to the Northwest Forest Plan.

Best regards,



Louis Geltman
Vice President for Policy and Government Relations
Outdoor Alliance

cc: Adam Cramer, Chief Executive Officer, Outdoor Alliance
Erik Murdock, Interim Executive Director, Access Fund
Beth Spilman, Executive Director, American Canoe Association
Clinton Begley, Executive Director, American Whitewater
Kent McNeill, CEO, International Mountain Bicycling Association
David Page, Executive Director, Winter Wildlands Alliance
Tom Vogl, Chief Executive Officer, The Mountaineers
Ben Gabriel, Executive Director, American Alpine Club
Rebekah Phillips, Executive Director, the Mazamas
Keegan Young, Executive Director, Colorado Mountain Club
Chad Nelsen, Chief Executive Officer, Surfrider Foundation

