

NEWS RELEASE

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New Report Shows “Climate Threat” of Proposed Nez Perce-Clearwater Forest Plan

Moscow, Idaho – A new report reveals that proposed Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forest (NPCNF) plan alternatives would drastically increase greenhouse gas emissions on public lands in Idaho and make the land more susceptible to wildfires, water shortages, heat waves, and other threats from climate change.

The report, completed by the Center for Sustainable Economy, shows that planned emissions from logging, roadbuilding, and grazing would emit at least 1.2 million tons of carbon dioxide in the most industry-intensive alternative. This would be about the same as putting 250,000 new cars on the road. The full report can be read at www.friendsoftheclearwater.org/forestclimate.

The report also highlights the failure of the Forest Service to properly account for climate impacts, as required under the [2012 Planning Rule](#) governing the revision of land management plans (also known as “forest plans”). The NPCNF’s 2019 [Draft Environmental Impact Statement](#) for the revised forest plan fails to disclose climate impacts associated with management activities despite readily available data to do so.

According to Dr. John Talberth, the lead author, “As the climate crisis deepens it is imperative that the Forest Service drastically reduce carbon emissions from logging, grazing, road construction and other damaging activities on federal lands to protect existing carbon stocks and allow the land to heal and become as climate resilient as possible. Sadly, the Nez Perce-Clearwater is headed in the opposite direction by considering a fourfold increase in logging and road building emissions and maintaining grazing related emissions at their current level.”

“The fact that an independent report like this is even necessary shows gross negligence on the part of the Forest Service,” said Paul Busch, of Moscow-based nonprofit Friends of the Clearwater (FOC). FOC wrote a grant that funded the report. “Climate change is actually upon us. The 2021 heat dome showed the Inland Northwest is not safe from incredible heat waves. Now is the time to protect our public forests as carbon reserves, not log them and add to climate dysfunction.”

Scientific research into forest carbon cycles has advanced quickly in recent years. Multiple studies show that logging, especially logging old-growth forests, is the primary driver of emissions in forests, far exceeding even intense wildfire. According to [a 2018 study](#), forestry is the leading source of greenhouse gas emissions for the entire State of Oregon, above the transportation and energy sectors. In contrast, a four year on-the-ground [study of a large wildfire in California in 2022](#) showed just a 2% reduction in carbon at the landscape level.

Older, wetter forests, like in north Idaho, [tend to be more carbon dense](#) than younger, drier forests elsewhere in the Rocky Mountains. This is in part due to the area producing large trees. Although they grow slowly, the [largest trees store disproportionate amounts of carbon](#) in forests.

Old-growth forests have made news lately, as the Biden administration’s effort to inventory mature and old-growth forests moves forward. The effort, which follows through on a 2022 executive order on forests, has led to estimates of the total mature and old-growth left on public lands in the United States. A comment period asking what actions the USFS should take ends this week, on July 20th.

“This report is really important in the context of the old-growth initiative,” said Jeff Juel, policy director of Friends of the Clearwater. “What we see, over and over, is an agency that outwardly claims to care about climate change while putting out projects that target mature and old-growth forests with abandon. The Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forest was actually required to measure and protect old-growth forest wide in the 1987 plan, but that kind of management conflicts with corporate interests, so it’s been avoided.”