


FOREST NEWS



Forest Service Employees for Environmental Ethics

Spring 2026

Nantahala National Forest



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INVASIVE TRIPLE THREAT / FIRE DEFICIT / PUBLIC LANDS FOR AI? /
FS REORGANIZATION / BOUNDARY WATERS AT RISK

FS Reorganization: Remodel or Demolition?

The current administration has embraced the tech-bro mantra: “Move fast and break things.” Here’s a quick overview. The Forest Service is currently working on new rules to reduce public engagement in environmental reviews and rescind protection for 45 million acres of inventoried roadless areas.

Sweeping emergency declarations assert an alleged need for dramatic active management in the name of forest health, wildfire mitigation, and timber production. The agency is proposing multi-decade projects that will road, log, and degrade our forests without specifying where the roads and logging will occur – and consequently finding no negative impacts. The agency has fired aspiring new employees and released capable, experienced staff.

On March 31, the Forest Service released its long-awaited reorganization plan affecting approximately 6,500 employees across the Washington, D.C., headquarters; nine regional offices; and seven research stations. The agency headquarters will move from Washington to Salt Lake City. Fifteen state offices will replace the nine regional offices. Six new agency-wide operational service centers be established, as

will a national training center. The dysfunctional Albuquerque Service Center will remain as a business support center.

Diving into the reorganization plan affirms that multiple things can be true at once. The reorganization makes the agency less top-heavy, rectifies some overspending, and retains dedicated staff at the forest and district levels. It also sidelines science, diminishes federal capacity, erodes the civil service, and pushes public lands closer to state and, potentially, private control. There are no forced employee reductions, but hundreds will be reassigned to new locations.

Two-thirds of the agency’s staff in Washington will be moved to Salt Lake City or operational service centers. A number of regional office employees and agency researchers will also be relocated. It remains to be seen how many will actually move versus leave the agency. For comparison, when the first Trump administration moved the BLM headquarters to Grand Junction, Colorado, only 41 of 328 employees moved – the rest left the agency, suggesting that another mass exodus of dedicated employees could further erode agency talent and institutional knowledge.

In explaining the intent behind the reorganization, Department of Agriculture Secretary Brooke

Rollins asserted, “Moving the Forest Service closer to the forests we manage is an essential action that will improve our core mission of managing our forests.” This rationale does not apply to research functions.

While the nine regional offices are shifting to 15 state offices, the agency’s seven research stations will compress into a single station. Seventy-five percent of agency research facilities – at least 57 – will be closed. Only 19 labs will be left to provide the best available science for 193 million acres of national forests and grasslands. Forest Service researchers bridge the gap between theoretical ecology and effective land management. They produce world-class science.

But scientific facts and findings are problematic when the official narrative is counterfactual – economic extraction masquerading as ecological emergency, utter denial serving as official climate-change policy, and so on. It gets even more awkward when the law requires the agencies to use the “best available science.” Gutting world-class research makes the best science unavailable.

Similarly, the agency’s civil service professionals stand in the way of efforts to install spoils-and-

Cover: Nantahala National Forest sunset, Cowee Mountain Overlook, Blue Ridge Parkway.

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The Forest Service reorganization is a lot like the proposed White House State Ballroom. Damage is being done, and the outcome is yet to be determined.

patronage cronyism. While far from perfect, the Washington headquarters, regional offices, and research stations established norms of following laws and regulations, adhering to congressional budgets, applying science, upholding multiple-use values, and conducting environmental reviews with public engagement.

These norms provided the stabilizing backbone that enabled the agency to manage our national forests in a steady fashion despite changing administrations. With just a couple of exceptions, leaders were career employees hired on a merit basis. In short, the reorganization is changing more than offices. Breaking up the headquarters, regional offices, and research stations then spreading thinned agency leadership into a state-based model is the equivalent of a spinal removal that will make the Forest Service pliable.

Current leadership suggests that state directors, operational service center directors, the national research director, and additional positions in the relocated headquarters will be

filled with career employees – but they are being newly classified to allow future appointment of partisans. State directors will coordinate directly with state governors and state foresters to provide policy-responsive leadership. One vision behind the reorganization is for the Forest Service to pledge allegiance to the unitary executive and the states it serves.

So, is the sky falling? Again, multiple things can be true at once. The administration is determined to move fast and break things per its Project 2025 to-do list, but will the authority, funding, and support to carry out the reorganization manifest? There are rules for restructuring the government. Negotiations, revisions, and lawsuits are inevitable.

While frequently hopping onto the bandwagon, Congress has pumped the brakes on some administration machinations by either funding agencies as before or not funding proposed changes (like the Wildland Fire Service). A subsequent administration

may change things back (e.g., the Biden administration moved BLM headquarters back to Washington).

It's important to note the difference between what is proposed and what is accomplished and to weigh in appropriately. People rallying against profiteering, exploitation, and degradation helped create the first laws protecting our public lands. More recently, people rallying against transferring public lands to state and private control helped preserve our national forests. People rallying for good governance and genuine stewardship will prevail again.

FSEEE is honored and inspired to play our part speaking for the trees and encouraging others to do the same. Our members and supporters empower our work, and we are incredibly grateful for your steadfast support in trying times.

Sincerely,

Kevin Hood



Featured Forest

Nantahala National Forest

Prior to the 1700s, the land encompassed by the **Nantahala National Forest** was inhabited by the Cherokee people. Nantahala is a Cherokee word meaning “Land of the Noonday Sun,” a reference to the steep landscape where sunlight only reaches the valley floor at midday.

After European-Americans settled in the area, large-scale logging operations stripped vast areas of old-growth forest, and rail lines were built to extract the timber. Ecological damage was extensive. Much of the Forest’s acreage was purchased after the 1911 Weeks Act authorized the federal government to acquire land to protect watersheds, and **the Nantahala was designated a national forest in 1920.**

The Nantahala is the largest of the four national forests in North Carolina. It includes the Joyce Kilmer Memorial

Forest, approximately 3,800 acres of virgin forest named in memory of Joyce Kilmer, best known for his poem “Trees.” One of the largest stands of old-growth trees in the eastern United States, the Memorial Forest is a rare example of old-growth cove hardwood forest, unique to the Appalachian Mountains.

Dominant species are tulip tree/ yellow poplar, oak, basswood, beech, and sycamore. Some trees are more than 400 years old, and the oldest tulip trees are more than 20 feet in circumference and 100 feet tall. The old-growth forest serves as a significant carbon sink and contains some of the densest biomass on earth.

Missing from the landscape is the American chestnut. Once the dominant tree of the forest, chestnuts were decimated by invasive chestnut blight, introduced when Asian

chestnuts were imported in the early 20th century. In the Memorial Forest, massive rot-resistant chestnut logs and stumps endure today.

More recently, old-growth eastern hemlocks have fallen victim to the invasive woolly adelgid. Concerned that a falling tree might injure a visitor, Forest Service managers decided to blow up the trees with explosives in a way they believed would mimic natural windthrow. The action significantly altered the ecosystem.

Whitewater boating, hiking, and backpacking are popular recreation activities on the Nantahala, which contains three wilderness areas:

- Ellicott Rock (3,900 acres).
- Southern Nantahala (10,900 acres).
- Joyce Kilmer-Slickrock (13,100 acres).

At 5,800 feet above sea level, Lone Bald is the highest point in the Forest.

Forest Health Faces Triple Threat From Invasives

Among invasive grasses, cheatgrass is Public Enemy Number One in our Western national forests, increasing both the frequency and severity of wildfire. Cheatgrass cemented its status with a hundred-year record of robbing crops and native plants of water and nutrients while continuing to expand into native ecosystems. But there may be a new sheriff in town — and its name is ventenata. What makes this relatively recent invader such a threat is its ability to thrive in areas that have proven resistant to invasion by cheatgrass and medusahead, another invasive villain.

Also known as medusahead rye, this nonnative grass invaded North America not long after cheatgrass. Medusahead is native to Southern and Central Europe, North Africa, and Asia. As a winter annual, it can outcompete native grasses and forbs, and like cheatgrass, it is changing the ecology across western North America. Medusahead's modus operandi is similar to cheatgrass. It invades disturbed sites, grasslands, openings in chaparral, and oak woodlands. It has already established

itself from Washington, Oregon, and California to Colorado, Wyoming, and Montana. After going to seed, “medusahead plants persist as a dense litter layer that prevents germination and survival of native species, ties up nutrients, and contributes to fire danger in the summer.”

Cheatgrass and medusahead exacerbate fire risk because they provide an easily ignitable, continuous, fine-fuel source that promotes rapid spread of wildfire into forest, sagebrush and chaparral ecosystems. Ventenata takes fire risk to a new level by increasing the continuity of fine fuels across landscapes previously not susceptible to fire spread. Becky Kerns, Ph.D., is a research ecologist with the Forest Service Pacific Northwest Research Station. She calls the ventenata invasion a “perfect storm” that is threatening forest resilience. In response to growing concerns about this invasive newcomer, Kerns began researching ventenata in the 27,400-square-mile Blue Mountains Ecoregion to better understand potential impacts. Wildfires in this part of eastern Oregon burned nearly 319,000 acres in 2014 and 2015. Wildfire in the West is common, but as Dr. Kerns demonstrated, these



The Spring Basin Wilderness Area near Clarno, Oregon, is dominated by native bunchgrasses (seen here) and western juniper, providing important habitat and forage for native wildlife. Nonnative plants like medusahead and cheatgrass have spread into Spring Basin, particularly where human activity has caused ground disturbance (BLM photo).



Medusahead is an invasive annual grass that germinates in fall, grows during winter, and sets seed in spring before dying to provide easily ignited fine fuel just as fire season begins (photo by Steve Dewey, Utah State University).

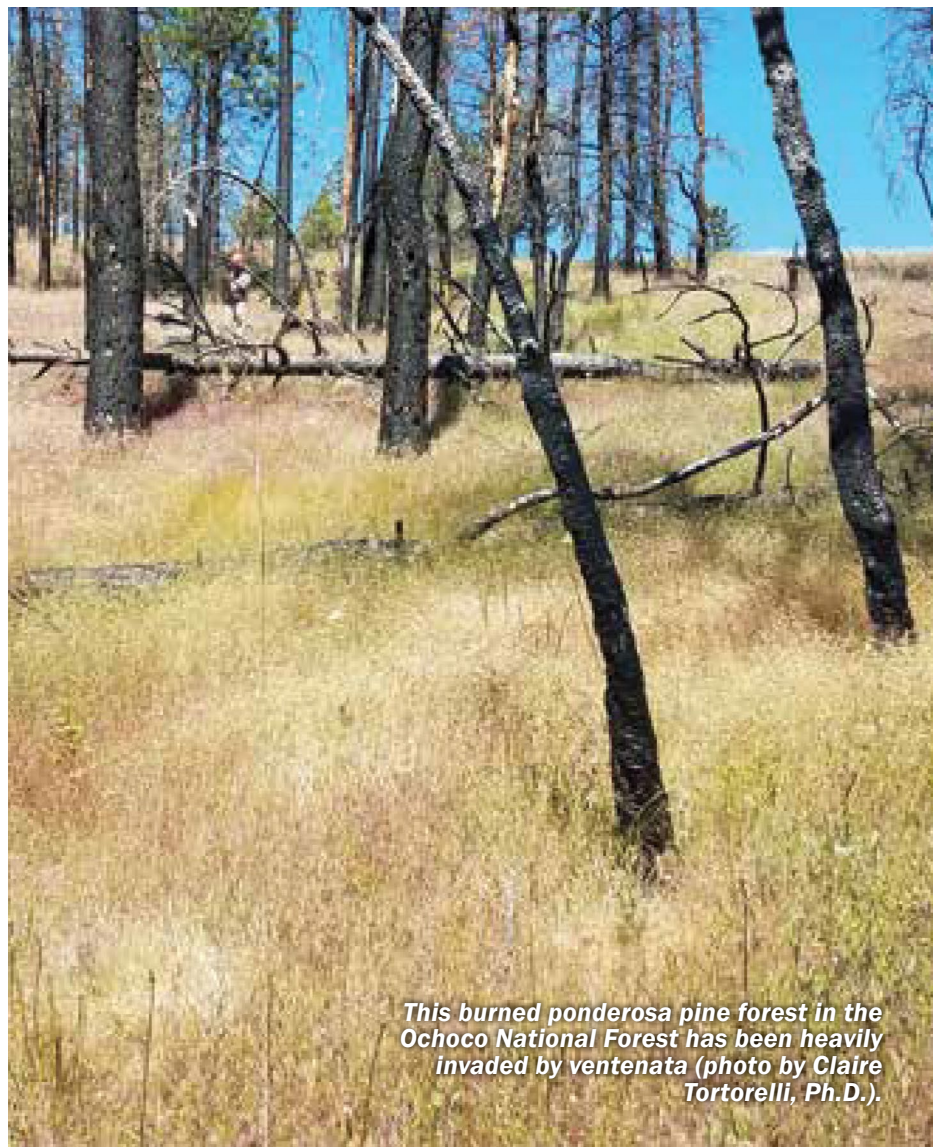
Not only is ventenata contributing to unprecedented wildfires, but those fires are likely exacerbating the ventenata invasion. Cheatgrass has long been recognized as a contributor to wildfire in the American West. After a fire, many native grasses and forbs are dead, but fire-resistant cheatgrass seeds quickly sprout in burned areas, expanding the invasion by crowding out the recovery of native species. The grass-fire cycle then begins all over again – invasion, fire, expanded invasion.

Ventenata behaves similarly, but in different places, as evidenced by the 2014-15 fires in the Blue Mountains Ecoregion. Ventenata can flourish, not only in rocky scablands, but also at higher elevations than cheatgrass. Ventenata also doesn't need the kind of ground disturbance that gives cheatgrass and medusahead a competitive advantage. Once established, its sheer density contributes to high loads of easily ignited fine fuels, creating the same grass-fire cycle as cheatgrass.

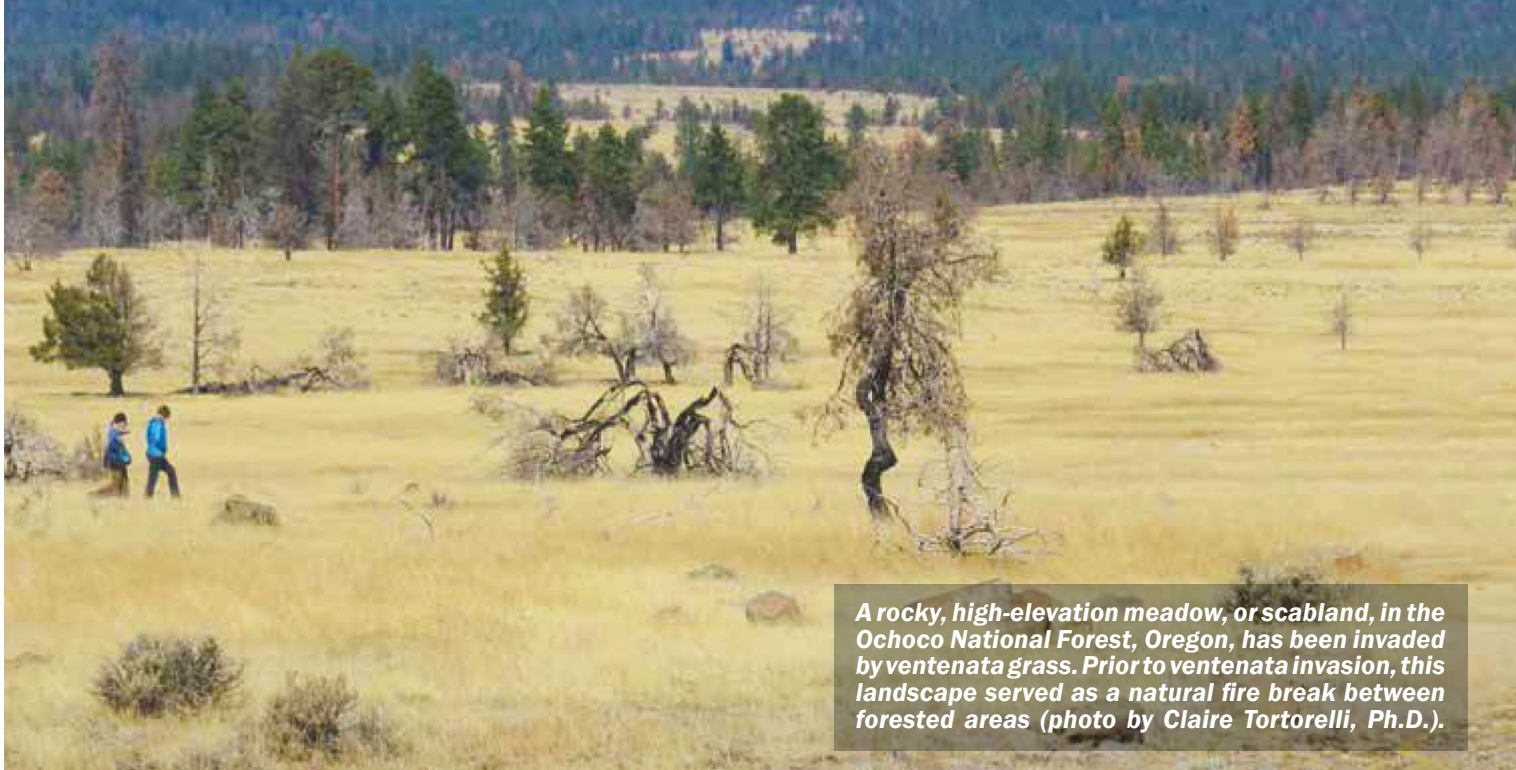
fires were different. They started in areas that had not previously burned.

First identified in North America (Washington) in 1952, ventenata is now expanding into sparsely vegetated rocky meadows, or “scablands,” which form a natural fire break: “If fire sweeps through nearby forests, scablands interrupt the spread because they have insufficient fuel to carry fire,” the report reads. Despite decades of exposure to invasive grasses, these areas have proven resistant due to difficult growing conditions.

Ventenata has changed that dynamic. It heavily invades scablands and produces extensive beds of highly combustible fuel. As a result, fire can easily move into adjacent forests, exacerbating landscape-scale fire risk. Once fire burns through a scabland, it creates space for ventenata to expand, squeezing out other plant species and contributing to a shift from shrub-dominated perennial communities to nonnative annual grasslands. This “highly combustible bridge” spreads fire into adjacent areas, and when those areas have already been invaded by cheatgrass and/or medusahead, the results can be devastating.



This burned ponderosa pine forest in the Ochoco National Forest has been heavily invaded by ventenata (photo by Claire Tortorelli, Ph.D.).

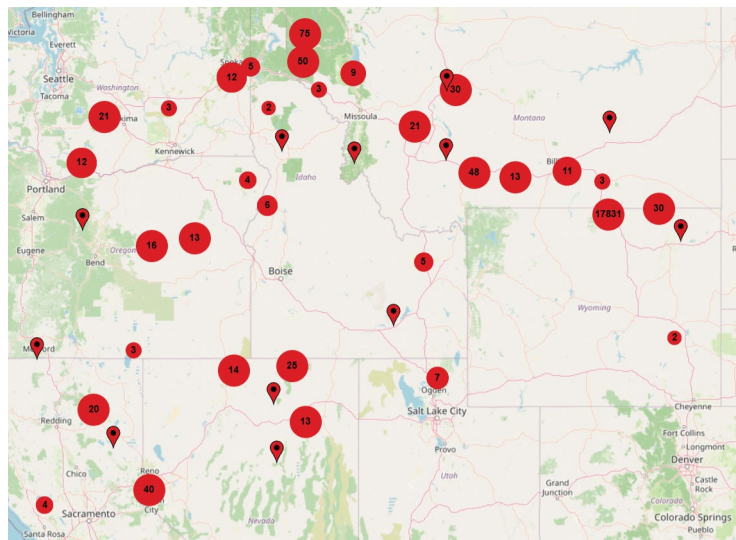


A rocky, high-elevation meadow, or scabland, in the Ochoco National Forest, Oregon, has been invaded by ventenata grass. Prior to ventenata invasion, this landscape served as a natural fire break between forested areas (photo by Claire Tortorelli, Ph.D.).

To understand ventenata’s ecological and wildfire impacts, Kerns and her colleagues documented:

- Existing conditions.
- How conditions have changed and are changing.
- Factors that exacerbate the invasion.
- Changes to fuels and fire regimes.

The research team’s on-the-ground observations and wildfire simulation modeling show that a ventenata invasion can increase the frequency, intensity, and size of a fire. Because ventenata creates fuel continuity across natural fire breaks, it also increases transmission across forested landscapes.



The Early Detection and Distribution Mapping System shows how ventenata has already spread from Washington (upper left) into other Western states (eddmaps.org, Center for Invasive Species and Ecosystem Health, University of Georgia).

While somewhat limited, the empirical data on ventenata informs the work of fire ecologist Claire Tortorelli, Ph.D., who led the research team that conducted the first regional modeling analysis of how invasive annual grasses affect fire behavior in Western forest ecosystems. **The study demonstrates** that annual grass invasion can influence landscape-scale fire, “despite primarily invading relatively small nonforested patches,” substantially increasing burn probability and flame lengths, which will impact native plant communities and wildlife habitat. The Tortorelli report warns, “Grass invasions could have implications for forest and biodiversity loss as forest patches become surrounded by invasion and post-fire forest recovery is inhibited by competitive grasses.”

Invasive grasses proved to be a theme during the recent Forest Service **Science Deep Dive webinar series** convened by the **Rocky Mountain Research Station**. Dr. Kerns served as an expert panelist, where she emphasized that, while forest treatments to establish fuel breaks may “bring fire down to the ground,” they frequently create “fast fire conditions” that make matters worse and increase fire risk in the wildland urban interface “due to invasive grasses.” She stressed the importance of monitoring invasive species in wildfire treatment areas, especially along travel corridors.

As Kerns sums up the situation: “Treating invasives is treating fuels.”

We Need a New Deal for North America's Forests

A Cross-Boundary Perspective From Canada

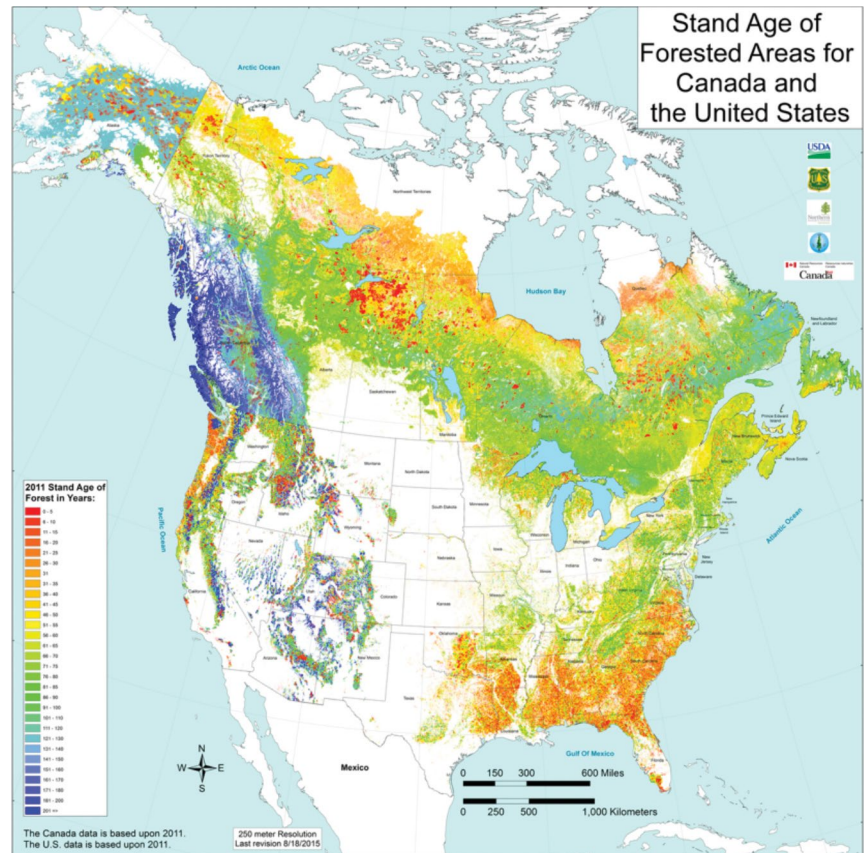
by Julian Axmann

Our public lands face unprecedented assaults – from expanding industrial extraction and diminishing conservation protections to shifting climate patterns. The extent and immediacy of threats like deforestation, wildfire, drought, and loss of livelihood can be overwhelming. Nonetheless, forest conservation advocates need to continue playing the long game – as we say in Canada, “You have to play to where the hockey puck is going.” The U.S. and Canada are blessed with some of the finest temperate forests in the world. Hopefully, our cross-boundary perspective can help strengthen shared conservation values and encourage visionary action to reinvigorate those forests and the communities that rely upon them.

THE PACIFIC WILDWAY

The accompanying map of U.S. and Canadian forests shows old forests (blue and green) stretching from Alaska through British Columbia and down the West Coast well into California. These are remarkable forests, including the largest intact temperate rainforest in the world. Our friends at the [Wildlands Network](#) point out that these world-class wet forests are part of the greater “Pacific Wildway,” which extends beyond Southern California into Mexico.

While British Columbia and the Pacific Northwest have seen heavy logging, significant ecological value still exists in what remains of these old forests. A huge part of that value lies in restoration potential, not only from a biodiversity-climate standpoint, but also as a source of transition employment for forestry workers. These workers constitute a professional workforce. They have invested decades of their lives to acquire the skills and equipment needed to perform forestry jobs. Refocusing their work from logging



This forest-age map of North America shows older trees in blue and green as well as cross-boundary “wildways” that can be strengthened through strategic restoration and rewilding.

to restoration will leverage their skills and their front-line knowledge to benefit these forest landscapes while supporting a stable economic base for local communities. Forest restoration also supports local recreation-based businesses.

THE WESTERN WILDWAY

In the north of the British Columbia interior, another band of old forest, the “Western Wildway,” straddles the Northern Rockies and extends along the “Spine of the Continent” into Arizona and New Mexico. In

the north and in the higher elevations are cold forests that serve as climate refugia, and on the leeward side of the mountains lie dry forests with excellent wildlife habitat values. Decades of clear-cutting in British Columbia caused widespread habitat fragmentation, but this region remains a wildlife stronghold, providing opportunities for species reintroductions into the Lower 48 States, as has been done with California bighorn sheep.

[BC Spaces for Nature](#) has already helped protect 8.4

million acres of British Columbia wilderness, and we're passionate about continuing our conservation work.

THE EASTERN WILDWAY

Centuries of logging, farming, and settlement have reshaped eastern North America's forests. The pockets of older forests and the woodlands connecting them — extending from Newfoundland, Ontario, and Quebec into New England, Appalachia and the Southeast — are all the more important to protect. In some areas, mature trees have returned for the first time since the virgin forests were clear-cut.

But today's policies emphasizing timber harvests have made these trees targets for logging. In spite of current governmental shortsightedness, grassroots momentum is already shifting in favor of conservation values. Now is the time to plan ahead and "play to where the puck is going." We need to be ready with a conservation action strategy that extends across these globally significant forested landscapes.

THE NATURE, CLIMATE, JOBS SOLUTION

A strategy without a sound economic foundation, rooted in the land, is doomed to failure in the current global economic system. This gets to the crux of the work we've been doing. We're calling it the Nature, Climate, Jobs (NCJ) Solution for Forests. It addresses the need to protect, restore, and renew forests and the forestry industry. Working with allies like [Global Choices](#) and [Colorado Headwaters](#), we promote a practical, common-sense strategy for preserving core conservation values and supporting economically sustainable enterprises in forest communities.

NATURE NEEDS HALF

While the U.S. and Canada were once world leaders in creating protected areas, the work is not yet complete. Leading ecologists, notably the late E.O. Wilson, taught us that, to ensure our best chance of holding onto life as we know it, we need to protect half of all ecosystems: "Nature Needs Half." However, full protection of remaining intact lands will not get us to 50% — we need to do more.

ENTERING THE ERA OF RESTORATION

Preservation is obviously not an option in fragmented forests. To that end, conservation needs to fill the gap. Conservation includes restoration, aka, rewilding. BC Spaces for Nature is advocating for the introduction of a



The scale of logging is difficult to comprehend in British Columbia, where 100 million acres, an area the size of California, have been impacted. The restoration potential in terms of jobs, wildlife habitat, carbon storage, and climate resilience is truly immense (photo by Ric Careless).

new, permanent legal designation for forest conservation — Carbon Buffer Forests. Large-scale conservation also includes restoring unused logging roads that cause erosion, sedimentation in streams, and other ecosystem damage. "Decommissioning" these unmaintained roads puts local workers on the land where they can earn a good living by putting to use their equipment, skills, and expertise while restoring native ecosystems. Their work will improve the hydrological function of forests that help mitigate both floods and droughts, and fewer logging roads means fewer opportunities for wildfire ignitions, most of which are started by humans.

Wildfire is a real threat, and we need to keep our communities safe. But fire is also a natural part of healthy forest ecosystems, so the notion that we can log our way out of wildfire risk in the great outdoors is short-sighted and flawed. We need to work *with*, not *against* Nature. Even if good science suggested that wildfire treatments worked in wilderness, how and why would we pay for that when wilderness fire poses little, if any, risk to our communities?

When it comes to keeping communities safe, by far the best return on investment focuses on home hardening — preventing homes from igniting during wildfire events. This requires recognizing that 80-90% of homes burned by wildfire are ignited by firebrands blown on the wind. Even insurance companies are recognizing this Pyrocene reality. Having experienced financial losses from recent wildfires, they are regrouping and requiring Firewise practices within the home-ignition zone as a prerequisite for providing homeowner's insurance.



Western redcedar (Thuja plicata) is revered as the “tree of life” in several Indigenous cultures of the Pacific Northwest. What remains of old-growth and primary forests needs to be a priority for preservation (photo by Julian Axmann).

CLIMATE-SMART FORESTRY

And yes, we need a viable timber industry. We can get more jobs per tree and higher value out of the forests by limiting commercial timber activity to the immediate vicinity of modernized mills. The commercial forest will no longer be clear-cut but partially cut, with a fixed, well-maintained road network. This increases carbon absorption and storage while reducing carbon emissions and ecosystem loss. Instead of conifer plantations, which have higher fire risk, we should mimic Nature and plant natural, mixed forests. This will build resilience, not only in the local ecosystem, but also in the forest industry.

The current upheaval in the U.S. Forest Service is increasingly restricting U.S. conservation opportunities in our international forest corridors. Elimination of world-class scientists under the pretense of consolidating efficiency further degrades conservation capacity. Unfortunately, Canada is at a similar crossroads with worsening wildfires — our governments seemingly still cannot see the forest for the trees.

But when it comes to forest conservation, we have no intention of allowing the increased friction caused by a broken Zamboni to stop us from slapping the puck into the goal. The most important thing to remember is that a different future is not only doable but necessary: we can protect, restore, and renew our forests and forestry industries. If we manage to pull through these challenging times and hold onto some of the world’s greatest forests for future generations, we are contributing to a legacy much larger than any group or administration ever could.

Julian Axmann is executive director of [BC Spaces for Nature](#), where he has worked with leading scientists, economists, and First Nations leaders to formulate the NCJ Solution for British Columbia’s forests. Julian’s background includes extensive conservation and natural-resources work in Tanzania. In 2020, he led an international fundraising campaign to support the endangered black rhinos of Mkomazi National Park.

Letter to the Editor

Dear Editor:

I have contributed to FSEEE for many years and greatly appreciate the informative publication, *Forest News*.

I greatly appreciate your dedicated, tireless efforts to push the Forest Service to be better in its missions, to highlight forest science, to protect Forest Service employees, and to give me specific actions to take to help out.

Sincerely,
Ross

Forest Service Supports NC Hurricane Recovery

The Forest Service has entered into a \$290 million Good Neighbor Agreement with the North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission to support Hurricane Helene recovery efforts. The agreement will “create new jobs, reduce overall costs and strengthen communities,” according to a [Forest Service press release](#).

This agreement [enables the Wildlife Commission](#) to undertake recovery efforts across the Pisgah and Nantahala national forests for the next 10 years. The Commission will remove storm debris, repair roads and recreation areas, and restore damaged watersheds.

Hurricane Helene devastated tens of thousands of acres on the Pisgah and Nantahala national forests in western North Carolina, including destruction of crucial infrastructure and damage to forest ecosystems.

“North Carolina’s national forests are an economic powerhouse, bringing billions of dollars into local communities through world class outdoor recreation,” said Forest Service Chief Tom Schultz. “Restoring access means restoring both livelihoods and the family moments that make these forests so meaningful.”

Sacrificing Natural Landscapes for Artificial Intelligence

In June, Republican Rep. Cliff Bentz of Oregon [introduced H.R. 655](#), the *Dalles Watershed Development Act*, which would transfer ownership of approximately 150 acres of Mount Hood National Forest from the citizens of the United States to the City of The Dalles, Oregon.

The legislation would give the city sole control over the land’s water. (Aye, there’s the rub.)

City officials have repeatedly denied that this congressional transaction is related to Google, but the computing giant has a large data-center operation in The Dalles and consumes roughly a third of the City’s annual water supply.

The City cites population growth as the reason for increased water needs. The Dalles, population 16,000(ish), has grown by about 1,700 in 15 years, according to [data from Portland State University](#).

Beavers Benefit Bats and Butterflies

Beavers are a true keystone species, so it should come as no surprise that two new studies broaden our understanding of beavers’ beneficial role, not only for aquatic life, but also for airborne creatures like bats and butterflies. Both studies were published by the [British Ecological Society](#).

[One study shows](#) that beavers’ landscape engineering produces conditions that support bats. One of those conditions is more standing deadwood. Dead trees that remain upright — i.e., snags — serve as roosts for some bat species and attract insects like beetles, gnats, flies, and moths.

The combination of abundant water and insects provides fertile foraging for bats, whose ecological benefits are well-documented, especially for limiting the spread of disease by mosquitoes.

[The other study](#) demonstrates how beaver-engineered wetlands attract butterflies and other pollinators essential to healthy ecosystem function. Comparing beaver complexes to manmade ponds and wetlands, the study found 119 percent more individual hoverflies (dragonflies) and 45 percent more individual butterflies per visit than the artificial sites.



Forest Service crews work to clear trees and debris in the aftermath of Hurricane Helene at the Tennessee-North Carolina state line (Forest Service photo).



The data center in The Dalles was Google’s first. The computing demands of artificial intelligence have fueled the rapid growth of data-center water consumption (photo by Lambtron, Wikipedia).



Colorado’s Mount Elbert provides a scenic backdrop for a pond and wetlands engineered and maintained by the beavers residing in this beaver lodge.

Forest Service Advances Old-Growth Logging on the Tongass

The Forest Service is promoting a plan to log more than 4,000 acres of old-growth trees on the Tongass National Forest near Ketchikan. The project site, which surrounds Carroll Inlet on both sides, is around 41,000 acres in total.

As reported by Sydney Dauphinais for Alaska Public Media, Cathy Tighe, Forest Service district ranger with the Ketchikan Misty Fjords Ranger District, said, “The cut will allow for more than logging — it will also create new recreation opportunities.”

Betsey Burdett owns a local kayaking and ziplining company. She told APM that she’s seen logging projects of this size before, and she “doesn’t see it as responsible development.”

Nathan Newcomer with the Southeast Alaska Conservation Council told APM he believes that there are better ways to go about logging — literal “mom and pop operations,” or “a tribe, for example, they might want to go chop down one old-growth tree to build a canoe or carve a totem pole.”

The Forest Service will attempt to sell this old-growth timber after completing the environmental analysis required by the National Environmental Policy Act.

Climatologist: Fuel-Reduction Logging is a Trojan Horse

Dr. James Hansen, Adjunct Professor at Columbia University’s Earth Institute and former Director of NASA’s Goddard Institute for Space Studies, doesn’t like the Fix Our Forests Act. A Boston Globe op-ed coauthored by Hansen and attorney Dan Galpern questions basic premises of the proposed legislation and calls fuel-reduction logging a “Trojan horse.”

“The pretense of the legislation is that deep forest logging will reduce fire intensity, risk to downwind communities, and climate-damaging carbon emissions.”

As the authors indicate, “considerable evidence” demonstrates that the conditions created by fire-mitigation logging can lead to increased fire intensity.

“Moreover, thinning may increase forest-derived carbon emissions ‘by three to five times relative to fire alone,’ in part because only a fraction of the carbon in felled trees ends up stored as lumber.”

Since this article was published, key provisions of the Fix Our Forests Act have been attached to the must-pass 2026 Farm Bill, H.R. 7567.

Ag Department Makes Billion-Dollar Deal for Fire Retardant

In spite of a lack of scientific evidence supporting the effectiveness of aerial fire retardant, in spite of revelations that show toxic heavy metals in fire retardant, and in spite of setbacks in federal court, Agriculture Department Secretary Brooke Rollins signed a \$1.12 billion contract for Perimeter Solutions to provide aerial fire retardant for five years.

A statement from the Ag Department crows about the contract negotiations, which “align with President Trump’s common sense business mindset that ensures we are not being taken advantage of anymore.”

As the New York Times reported just before the deal was signed, “The entire supply of [aerial fire retardant] in the United States is controlled by a single company” — Perimeter Solutions, which has been the exclusive provider to the Forest Service since 2005.

The Department’s statement claims the new contract strengthens U.S. manufacturing “by keeping fire-retardant production made in America” and touts “hundreds of millions” in savings, even though history demonstrates that monopolies never produce cost savings for the customer.



An aerial view of the Tongass National Forest reveals a patchwork of previous old-growth logging near Ketchikan, Alaska.



Ecological damage, including soil compaction, is evident as a result of this fuel-reduction project in Arizona’s Kaibab National Forest (Forest Service photo).



Forest Service use of Phos-Chek fire retardant, produced exclusively by Perimeter Solutions, is ramping up in spite of problems with toxicity and questionable effectiveness.



Fire plays an integral role in maintaining forest health, and in spite of recent increases in acres burned by wildfire, scientists have documented a “significant fire deficit” relative to historical wildfire events in many forests.

Dispatch

Study Reveals ‘Substantial, Persistent Fire Deficit’

Government agencies and corporate media consistently emphasize the expansion of wildfire acreage caused by a warming climate. Studies that examine only two or three decades of North American fire history support these claims. “Considering these studies, forest managers and the general public may be surprised to learn that a significant fire deficit persists in many forested ecosystems,” according to a [peer-reviewed study](#) conducted by a team of scientists led by Sean Parks with the Forest Service Rocky Mountain Research Station in Missoula, Montana.

For scientists, this recent increase in area burned raises questions about contemporary wildfire impacts (since 1984) versus historical fire regimes (pre-1880). Using a multi-century record encompassing more than 1,800 fire-scar sites across diverse forest types, Parks and his fellow scientists discovered “a substantial, persistent fire deficit from 1984-2022 in many forest and woodland ecosystems, despite recent increases in burning.”

Published in *Nature Communications*, the Parks study finds, “Contemporary fire occurrence is still far

below historical (1600-1880) levels, in spite of multiple ‘record-breaking’ recent fire years.... Individual years with particularly widespread fire during the 1984-2022 period were not unprecedented in comparison with the active fire regimes of the historical period across most of the study region.”

The evidence indicates that, even under a warming climate, the burn rate “in recent decades has been much lower than historical rates across most of the continent. We attribute this disparity to aggressive fire suppression, disruption of traditional burning, and forest loss and fragmentation from land development and other land uses.” The results of the Parks team’s research show that, despite increases in areas burned in recent decades, “recent years with exceptionally high areas burned are not unprecedented when considering the multi-century perspective.... Although contemporary fire extent is not unprecedented across many North American forests, there is abundant evidence that unprecedented contemporary fire severity is driving forest loss in many ecosystems and adversely impacting human lives, infrastructure, and water supplies.”



Alpine Lake in Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness on the Superior National Forest. The threat from sulfide-ore mining has returned to this pristine landscape in northeastern Minnesota.

Back From the Dead

Republicans Weaponize CRA to Resurrect Boundary Waters Mining Threat

Republicans, guided by the [Project 2025 blueprint](#), may have dealt a blow to the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness on the Superior National Forest in Minnesota. Using a dubious legal tactic, the GOP has opened the door to a mining operation that will pollute the pristine waters of the National Forest System's most-visited wilderness area. The Congressional Review Act (CRA) has been around since 1996. Its enactment created an expedited process for Congress to overturn agency rules within certain parameters. To overturn such a rule, Congress must initiate a resolution within 60 days. If the resolution passes, the President's signature makes it so. At this writing, the resolution is headed to the Senate floor.

The "rule" that Republicans may have now overturned is Public Land Order 7917, signed by Secretary of the Interior Deb Haaland in 2023. The first problem with this action is that a public land order has never before been considered a "rule" under the CRA. Secondly, the order was implemented three years ago. Haaland's order withdrew more than 225,000 acres on the Superior National Forest from mineral leasing for 20 years. (Mineral rights are the purview of the Interior Department, even when the minerals lie beneath national forest land.)

Rescinding the Biden-era rule rolls out the red carpet for Twin Metals Minnesota to build and operate an industrial sulfide-ore mining operation on the Superior National Forest upstream from Boundary Waters. Twin Metals is a subsidiary of Antofagasta plc — a Chilean-based mining group and one of the world's largest copper producers. Mining sulfide ores requires blasting

rock from underground to extract the metal-bearing ore, which comprises less than 1% of the rock. When the blasted rock is exposed air, the sulfide minerals oxidize and combine with water to create sulfuric acid, which then leeches heavy metals into the water, spreading toxic contamination downstream.

Twin Metals Minnesota is [listed on the corporation's website](#) as an "underground mining project, which holds copper, nickel/cobalt, and PGM deposits in north-eastern Minnesota." The "planned project ... envisages mining and processing 18,000 tonnes of ore per day for 25 years to produce three separate concentrates – copper, nickel/cobalt and PGM."

Copper, nickel and cobalt are valuable metals, but PGM, or [Platinum Group Metal](#), "typically includes six closely related metals" that are often found together in mineral deposits. These six metals are Platinum, Palladium, Rhodium, Iridium, Osmium, and Ruthenium. As of this writing, spot prices for these PGMs are:

- Platinum — \$2,059/ounce
- Palladium — \$1,538.15/ounce
- Rhodium — \$10,450.00/ounce
- Iridium — \$7,900/ounce
- Osmium — \$43,644/ounce
- Ruthenium — \$1,750/ounce

Despite the demand for and value of these metals, local communities currently rely on \$17 million in annual revenue from an outdoor recreation economy that will be harmed by mining operations, along with clean air, clean water, and irreplaceable wilderness qualities.

Debunking Early-Successional Habitat Myths

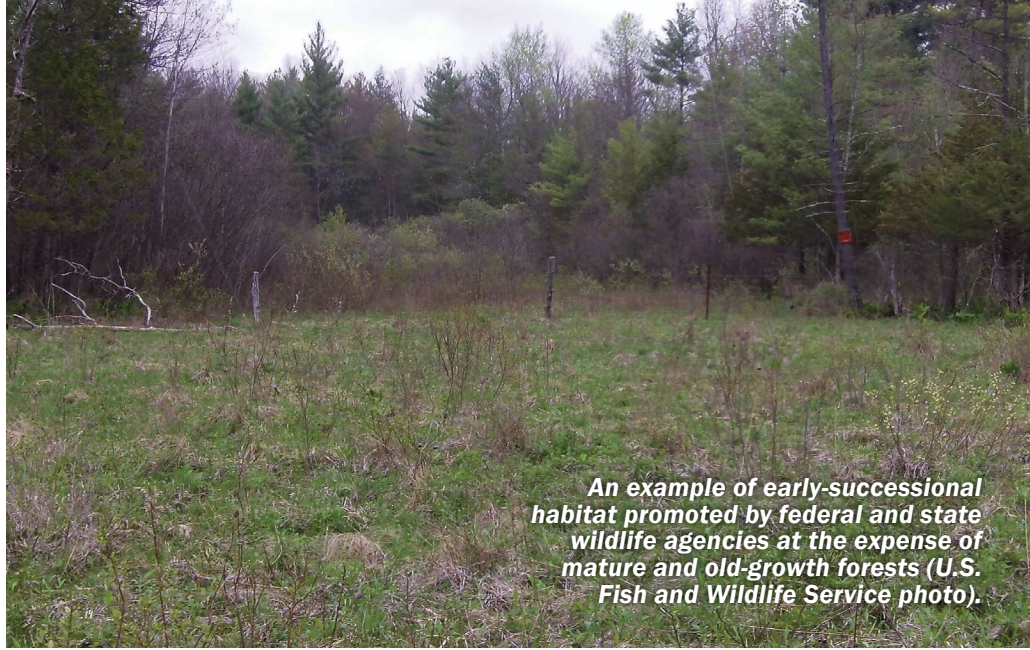
“A campaign is underway to clear established forests and expand early-successional habitats ... with the intention of benefiting specific species.” So begins a 2023 report published in *Frontiers in Forests and Global Change*. The authors of that report

analyze this forest-management trend with a focus on the Northeast and Upper Great Lakes regions. As these scientists make clear, efforts to cut established forests in favor of early-successional, or “pre-forest,” ecosystems are “coordinated by federal and state wildlife agencies and funded with public money.” The public land managers at these agencies work with well-funded special-interest groups – hunting and forestry lobbyists, land trusts, private landowners – toward this goal.

The authors of this report discuss successional habitat programs and policies in the context of “historical baselines, with respect to species’ ranges and abundance, and as they relate to carbon accumulation and ecosystem integrity.” They conclude that “public land forest and wildlife management programs must be reevaluated to balance the prioritization and funding of early-successional habitat with strong and lasting protection for old-growth and mature forests.” They also call for “far more robust, unbiased, and ongoing monitoring and evaluation.”

In their report the authors review historical research, the conservation rationale for forest-clearing campaigns, and the contrasts between natural old-growth forests and intensively managed forests in the Northeast and Upper Great Lakes regions. They note that the “ecological trajectory ... in the absence of intensive human activity is toward ‘old-growth’ forests: a resilient, diverse, carbon-dense, and self-sustaining ‘shifting mosaic’ of tree ages, microhabitats, and native species above and below ground.

The authors find that forest-clearing projects to support early-successional habitat in these regions “are proceeding without well-founded consideration of conditions before European settlement, long-term plans for experimental controls and monitoring, or baseline ecological inventories.” This agency-promoted junk



An example of early-successional habitat promoted by federal and state wildlife agencies at the expense of mature and old-growth forests (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service photo).

science ignores “quantifiable negative impacts—such as the spread of invasive species, elevated temperatures, increased fire and flood risk, destabilized and decreased climate mitigation and adaptation, degradation of healthy public green spaces, and ongoing expenditures of time and resources.”

Noting that forest-clearing campaigns create immediate negative impacts, the authors issue an “urgent” call to reassess this harmful forest-clearing campaign. The report cites two main rationales for ongoing forest-clearing efforts, both of which are “open to serious questions and alternative hypotheses.” The primary rationale cites the decline of a number of early-successional plant and animal species as “a pervasive and potentially existential threat.” The baseline for measuring this decline “almost invariably begins in the late 1960s, when populations had begun to decrease from abnormally high levels as forests recovered from past clearing.”

A second significant rationale is that early-successional habitats have dwindled, falling below levels that existed before European settlement. However, there is ample evidence that these habitats “are considerably more abundant than pre-settlement, and continue to expand.”

Given the findings of legitimate scientific studies, the authors conclude, “The campaign for early-successional forest clearing was formulated by a small number of agency, academic, and special interest professionals, with little comprehensive research.... This organized and aggressive campaign has confused the public and made it challenging for a range of scientists to engage in an open dialogue about an optimal and balanced approach that prioritizes climate stability, ecosystem integrity and public health.”



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Contact Congress!

Proposed legislation threatens the cultural and spiritual heart of the Southwest.

H.R. 606 aims to open 336,000 acres surrounding Chaco Culture National Historical Park to oil and gas development.

The bill would eliminate a vital buffer around Chaco Canyon — a UNESCO World Heritage site and a vital landscape for indigenous communities.

Industrial development would irreparably damage a fragile ecosystem with thousands of unmapped archaeological sites.

Tell your senators and representatives to protect Chaco Canyon:

Vote "No" on H.R. 606, and support the Chaco Cultural Heritage Area Protection Act (H.R. 2861 or S.1412).



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