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My family relishes exploring Idaho's forests, and I rarely know where I will be sleeping until we pull into some beautiful place and decide to set up camp. I laugh at the wild goose chases, but everything is worthwhile when we drive around a bend to see a hillside of trees ablaze with fall colors or freeze in our tracks, silently watching a bull elk bugle for a mate. At these moments, I realize how crucial it is to make sure these forests stay protected and healthy for future generations.

I think selective logging, while slightly diminishing the amount of logging, is one important way we can help the forest. By purposefully cutting down trees that are sick, bug infested, or from overgrown areas, humans can benefit from the timber and help keep the forest healthy at the same time. Loggers should be accountable for their practices and should have to receive permission from an organization that specializes in forest management. They could log away from water sources and pay special attention to the proper habitat for the animals in the area. Because some reduction in logging could affect the supply of wood products, companies should research potential substitute materials. Other industries that affect the forest, like mining and recreation, should also be evaluated for their environmental impact.

The animals that live in the forest are as important as the trees, but are generally more fragile. People should periodically check on, how species population and patterns change or stay the same, especially after a change in area management. By noticing problems before they become catastrophes, we will be able to better see the causes and make smaller changes to keep populations healthy.

I would also advocate a program that would involve more young people taking care of the forest. Living in a city, it can be hard to see how the forest is being affected by certain behaviors and why it is even so important to protect it. High schoolers could apply to work with the National Forest Service during school breaks. They could help research issues affecting the forest; this would give the Forest Service more information and the students a better understanding and appreciation of the forest.

People should not discount the idea that existing structures or behaviors can be changed to benefit the forest. I recently read about efforts to replace culverts under roads to make them easier and healthier for fish to navigate. This could also be applied to an existing road or recreation area that caused a problem.

With a combination of efforts, I think Idahoans can succeed at keeping forests healthy and productive. Someday, I will take my own children camping in the forest, teaching them proper attitudes while we watch the trees change color and listen to animals calling to each other. Hopefully, the forest will remain a valuable resource long into the future.