

**File Code:** 1950**Date:** December 18, 2023**Route To:****Subject:** Review of Proposed Projects with Management of Old Growth Forest Conditions**To:** Regional Foresters

On December 20, 2023, the Department is publishing a Notice of Intent to prepare an environmental impact statement for a National Old Growth Amendment in the Federal Register. The proposed amendment establishes national intent to maintain and improve amounts and distributions of old-growth forest conditions within national forest ecosystems and watersheds so that old-growth forest conditions are resilient and adaptable to stressors and likely future environments.

The purpose of this letter is to reserve to the National Forest System Deputy Chief the decision-making authority over management of old growth forest conditions on National Forest System lands during the amendment process. Effective immediately, any projects proposing vegetation management activities that will occur where old growth forest conditions (based on regional old-growth definitions) exist on National Forest System lands shall be submitted to the National Forest System Deputy Chief for review and approval.

This letter only affects the process by which such activities are authorized. It does not alter or prescribe any substantive standards for the management of old growth forests. Any project authorized through the process established by this letter must comply with all applicable laws and regulations, including, but not limited to, the National Environmental Policy Act. This review does not apply to actions necessary to control immediate impacts of an emergency which are urgently needed to mitigate harm to life, property, or important natural or cultural resources (36 CFR 220.4(b)(1)).

I want to ensure the careful evaluation of proposed vegetation management activities occurring in areas where old growth forest conditions exist while the national old growth amendment is developed. Please make your staff and especially your line officers aware of this direction. I understand this direction adds process requirements at a time when efficiency is paramount. I assure you that review of these projects will proceed expeditiously and build on our success using the Emergency Actions portal. I will issue specific instructions for the review process soon.

If you have questions, please contact the Ecosystem Management Coordination Director Linda Walker at linda.walker@usda.gov.



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CHRISTOPHER B. FRENCH
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cc: Linda Walker