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Comments: Dear Secretary Vilsack and Secretary Haaland,

I am tentatively heartened that the next steps will be taken to strengthen our national forests. I say tentatively because until they're done, I worry that something will derail what I feel is an absolutely essential order to not only protect habitat but is REQUIRED to help us fight climate change.

Protecting our mature and old-growth forests and trees on federal lands represents one of the simplest and cost-effective climate policies the U.S. can deploy at scale. But time is running short: the climate and biodiversity crises are growing exponentially worse, with unthinkable tipping points around the corner; Congress has failed to make significant progress on these crises through the tools it has at hand; and therefore, it is critical that you fulfill the President's directive to provide lasting protections for these trees, which may well prove to be our last line of climate defense.

President Biden's Earth Day Executive Order recognized the critical role mature and old growth forests play as a climate solution, as well as the urgent need to confront the threats forests face. If continued logging of these trees is allowed, the very values that let them play a vital role will be eliminated. Losing more of our mature & old-growth trees and forests to logging will only make the climate crisis worse: Scientific research indicates that logging of federal forests is a major source of carbon dioxide emissions to the atmosphere that is at least comparable to, and probably greater than, levels associated with wildfires. Let me be clear: logging, not wildfire, drought, or pests, is the greatest threat to our mature forests.

In summary, I urge the US Department of Agriculture and US Department of Interior to work together to initiate as soon as possible a rulemaking based on a definition of mature forests and trees (of 80 years), to permanently end the avoidable loss of their critically important carbon, water and wildlife values to logging.