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Title:

Comments: I am David Wildemann, a 5th generation Indiana resident. The Old-Growth amendment is so important to me that I wanted to send a personal letter in support of stronger protections for mature and old growth forests.

I grew up in rural southern Indiana with a large forest on former, unproductive, farm fields adjacent to our backyard. The forest was a monoculture dominated by small black locust trees and honeysuckle vines planted to prevent further erosion of the land. Nonetheless, in my youth, I spent countless hours in the forest on many adventures. In grade school, I learned about Indiana as it was settled by European immigrants that were moving west. I read stories of the mature old growth trees being logged to feed commercial interests and demand for building materials. I learned that there were so many trees that trees not needed for lumber were girdled to kill them and clear the land for farm fields. I imagined what these vast mature, old growth forests would have been like. I could never understand the greedy and self-serving interests of those generations as they cleared everything in site with no vision of saving anything for the future. As an adult, I was fortunate to be able to experience a mature redwood forest in California many years ago. In the last 15 years, I discovered there were a few nature preserves in Indiana that have preserved tiny remnants of old growth forest. Each time I visit or experience even a few mature or old growth trees I am in awe of the wonders that nature has to offer. I continue to wonder why we did not preserve more of these treasures. These experiences, spanning 60 + years, continue to shape who I am and the values I have. The attached picture is my wife and I in front of a mature tulip poplar tree.

I consider our old growth and mature forests as national treasures for us to preserve for our children, grandchildren, and all future generations. These natural treasures, while showcasing the beauty and wonder of the natural world, provide many other benefits. They can be a place of refuge for mental and spiritual well-being. These forests serve as wildlife habitat along with maintaining the plant and wildlife biodiversity that we are in constant danger of losing. They reduce flood and erosion risk while providing streams and rivers with cool clean water. These forests have important cultural values to many Americans including indigenous Native Americans. Tribal livelihoods and food systems depend on these forests. From a science perspective, forests are one of the most efficient, scalable, and cost-effective ways we have to absorb and store carbon. Preserving these forests can make a significant contribution to carbon storage, helping to mitigate climate change.

Currently we stand at a crossroad; to preserve our mature and remaining old growth forests or continue the extractive exploitation of these resources. Despite being cherished across the country, old-growth forests on federal lands remain unprotected from logging. These national and natural treasures are constantly in jeopardy by outdated policies that emphasizes the commercial interests of logging and other extractive uses. It is time to prioritize the conservation of these remaining national treasures for future generations. I am a strong advocate for new policies that protect and preserve old growth forests and let mature forests continue to grow into old growth forests.

Specifically, I am urging for the U.S. Forest Service to modify the Old-Growth Amendment with content to:

- \* Stop old-growth trees from going to the mill. The old growth trees that we have left are too precious to cut.

- \* Lay groundwork for conservation protections of mature forests to increase the distribution and abundance of old-growth across our public lands. Thus, ensuring that mature forests can develop into our next generation of old-growth forests.

Again, I ask that the Forest Service implement stronger protections in the Old-Growth amendment to protect mature and old growth trees on federal lands from logging and other commercial interests. Let's preserve and protect these national treasures for future generations to explore, enjoy, and experience the awe and wonder of the natural world. They are a glimpse into a past world that our ancestors once experienced.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

David Wildemann

ATTACHMENT: IMG 0850.jpg - picture of a man and a woman in front of a large tree