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Comments: I am writing to comment on the Land Management Plan Direction for Old-Growth Forest Conditions Across the National Forests System #65356.

I live in Montana and within the past month I have spent time hiking in the Custer Gallatin National Forest both in the Pryor Mountains and near Fairy Peak and Brackett Creek. I have also camped in the Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forest within the past week. All these areas contain mature and old-growth forests.

In addition to ending logging in old-growth forests, logging must be stopped in mature forests within the National Forest system. Mature forests can be defined as forests containing trees within 80-100 years of age, sometimes found in previously logged forests. Mature forests, while not possessing all the benefits to ecosystems, habitat & wildlife as those in old growth forests, are beginning to regain important status and value to forests. Mature forests must be protected along with old growth forests.

Neither mature or old-growth forests must be commercially logged - No logging of these forests should be allowed for any reason.

These trees are valuable beyond measure for wildlife and habitat. They also allow for absorption of large rainfalls, stopping dangerous erosion and flooding. Logged forests cannot provide this action. With climate change, we are seeing more extreme precipitation events. Mature and Old-Growth forests have root systems that can absorb rainfall more efficiently than younger, less established forests or monoclonal forests. Their ability to stabilize water tables and retain soil moisture provides an incredible advantage for at-risk communities.

With changing climates and a drying Western US, National Forests are an important source of drinking water. Their waterways, supported by clean water from old-growth and mature forests can withstand droughts and heatwaves. Watersheds containing forests provide cleaner water than from other sources.

Mature and Old-growth forests are a source of income and visitation for local economies. Human health benefits from spending time in them and offer many health benefits.

As climate warms, intact old-growth and mature forests can provide an understory that retains humidity, helping prevent severity of wildfires.

Mature and Old-growth forests serve as valuable carbon sinks. These forests can remove carbon pollution from the air. Even older, dead trees decaying on the forest floor can hold onto their stored carbon for decades or centuries as they slowly decay.

Each National Forest Management Plan or Travel Plan that has not specifically incorporated climate science into their plan needs to be revisited and methods to protect mature and old-growth forests need to be added. Attached in Montana's Climate Assessment from 2017 along with a 2021 addendum. When inventorying old growth and mature forests on public lands, we must not forget plant life that exists on drier landscape. Cacti and sage can be old growth. They can provide similar advantages to landscapes and habitat.

Mature and Old-Growth forests offer too many advantages to forests to cut them. Climate warming and weather extremes are upon us. The older trees offer too much to help ameliorate societal destruction to allow them to be logged for momentary financial gain. We no longer have the time or the climate to replace these forests.

ATTACHMENT: 2021_C2H2inMT_final.pdf - 2021 Montana Climate Assessment reviewed projected impacts of climate change; higher summer temperatures, less usable precipitation, greater health and safety risks, etc.

ATTACHMENT: Montana Climate Assessment Full 2017 Whitlock et. al..pdf - 2017 Climate Assessment - all aspects of agriculture are affected by climate change