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Comments: Dear Chief:

A coalition of environmental groups called on the U.S. Forest Service today to strengthen protections for the nation's mature and old-growth forests and trees. The move came in response to the agency's release of a draft environmental impact statement with proposals that could conserve old-growth across all national forests.

This is the most recent step in response to President Biden's 2022 executive order to develop policies to protect mature and old-growth forests on federal lands. It follows an initial scoping period, which closed Feb. 2

A 90-day public comment period for the draft environmental impact statement closes Sept. 20.

Mature and old-growth forests store huge amounts of carbon and keep it out of the atmosphere. They also contain essential habitats and clean water and feature highly fire-resilient trees. As the world experiences record-shattering heat and widespread climate disasters, protecting these forests is critical to preventing the worst consequences of climate change.

The vast majority of old-growth forests have already been logged.

Federally managed public lands have a critical share of the remaining old growth and the mature forests that could become old growth. Groups have identified dozens of logging projects that target mature and old-growth trees on federal lands.

The Climate Forests Campaign is a coalition of more than 120 organizations working to protect mature and old-growth trees and forests on federal land.

The U.S. Forest Service must fulfill the direction of President Biden's executive order to protect mature and old-growth forests for the climate, clean water and imperiled species.

This draft is a step, but the final policy must be significantly improved, including ending the practice of sending old-growth trees to timber mills. Logging old-growth trees to save the forest is a false solution [mdash] they are

worth more standing.

The agency must also take concrete action to recover the old growth that has been lost over the past centuries. In many parts of the country there is little to no old growth left, and by protecting mature forests, we can help ensure they become the old growth of future generations. We need meaningful protections for both mature and old-growth forests to ensure our national forests meet the most pressing environmental challenges of our time.

Yours sincerely,

Robert E. Rutkowski

20240621EmailRutkowskiToChiefMoore.pdf - same content that is coded in text box; it was also included as an attachment