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Comments: As a person of faith and conscience, I urge the U.S. Department of the Interior and U.S. Department of Agriculture to immediately begin a rule making process that ensures strong and lasting protections for mature and old-growth trees and forests across federal lands.

Conserving our mature and old-growth trees and forests represents one of the simplest and most cost-effective climate solutions available. Implementing this rule would support a powerful natural climate solution, helping us address the unprecedented threats of climate change and biodiversity loss while also safeguarding vital sources of clean water and recreation for all Americans.

As a person of faith, I recognize that all life is connected. Earth Day Executive Order 14072, Strengthening the Nation's Forests, Communities, and Local Economies describes the indispensable value that mature and old-growth forests provide. Unfortunately, across the country on federal forests, numerous logging projects that cut mature and old-growth trees continue to move forward. Guidance issued to the Forest Service does not acknowledge the threat the agency's own logging projects pose. Instead, the USDA guidance falsely denies the active logging of centuries-old forests and refuses to outline any meaningful steps to actually protect mature and old-growth forests.

The Department of Interior and Department of Agriculture must take much bolder action if the Biden administration is to truly embrace mature and old-growth forest conservation as a natural climate solution. That action must include an open, transparent public engagement process that results in meaningful, lasting regulations that endure as a climate legacy.

Protections of mature and old-growth forests is complementary to federal agencies' efforts to meet other management objectives, including securing clean drinking water for communities in a rapidly changing climate where droughts and floods are becoming more common; improving wildfire resilience by protecting large fire-resistant trees; and enhancing access to outdoor recreation opportunities.

I ask that you take this opportunity fulfill provisions in the President's order and position the United States as an international leader in forest conservation and natural climate solutions, offering a model for other nations to follow, and helping to protect our sacred web of life.