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Comments: From the research I have been doing, I have narrowed down old growth forests into two categories. Primary Old Growth Forests and Emerging Old Growth Forests. Primary Old Growth Forests are the original primeval forests that show no sign of human disturbance. The soils, pit and mound topography, and the multiple tree canopies are important indicators of primary old growth forests. Also, on the east coast, primary old growth forests will often have trees that are 300+ years old. On the west coast and in bald cypress forests in the southeast, the trees in primary old growth forests can even be 1,000+ years old. These are the rarest types of old growth forests.

The other type is Emerging Old Growth Forests. These are mature forests that have been disturbed by humans, but after a period of time, usually around 100 years, these forests start developing old growth characteristics. For example, on the east coast, these characteristics would include balding bark, stag-headed tree tops, and lack of underbrush on the forest floor due to the massive tree canopy. The oldest trees in emerging old growth forests are often between 100-250 years old. If left alone, these emerging old growth forests will eventually become primary old growth forests and start developing primary old growth characteristics such as old growth soils, pit and mound topography, and multiple tree canopies which is caused by blowdowns which leads to newer growth and an uneven aged forest. However, it is important that old growth forests be left alone in their natural state, unaltered by human activity. That includes no timber harvesting, no clearcutting, no thinning, and on the east coast, no burning. Human disturbance can lead to old growth forests losing the characteristics that make them old growth. It can also lead to the forests becoming less ecologically diverse, opening up the forests to invasives that will threaten the native tree and plant species, and disturbing the soils which could take hundreds to even thousands of years to recover. While some foresters say that management allows for newer tree growth, this will happen naturally through the canopy gaps caused by blowdowns. This natural forestation will allow for newer growth without opening up the canopy too much which can lead to invasives thriving in the forest.

It is also important to note that Old Growth Forests are not just old trees. While old trees are one aspect, old growth characteristics are equally important in sustaining the old growth forest ecosystem. If you destroy those old growth characteristics, it is just a second growth forest with old trees. Not an old growth forest anymore. Many of the characteristics found in old growth forests are not found in any second growth forest. Even emerging old growth forests are very different from second growth forests. These characteristics help make old growth forests one of the rarest and most important ecosystems on the planet. Old growth forests are also our most important carbon sinks, storing more carbon than any other forest. So, when old growth forests are logged, much of that carbon gets released into the atmosphere causing pollution.

These old growth forests should be treated as wilderness preserves. That includes our current primary old growth forests which are almost all gone, and our emerging old growth forests which, while more common, are still rare and could be our future primary old growth forests if we leave them alone.