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Comments: Dear Secretary Vilsack and Secretary Haaland,

I am writing to urge in the strongest possible terms that we must protect our mature and old-growth forests and trees on federal lands. For one thing, this is a simple and effective climate change policy. But our biodiversity issues are nearly as pressing, and the need is urgent to provide lasting protections for these priceless forests.

Mature forests provide many of the ecological roles as fully functional old-growth, such as storing carbon in large live and dead trees, attenuating flood events, and providing crucial wildlife habitat. Over time, mature forests will recover depleted areas. Yet less than a fifth of Pacific Northwest mature and old-growth forests survived earlier decades of industrial logging and development.

Mature and old-growth forest definitions must be concise, simple, and inclusive. The regional policy for the Pacific Northwest defines mature trees as trees 80 or older. Applying this definition more broadly in a protective policy will conserve our most climate and carbon-critical forests. Such forests collectively contain the bulk of the carbon currently stored in federal forests and they continue to sequester carbon at substantial rates. They also provide, across forest types, vital habitat and biodiversity benefits, and important sources of drinking water and clean air for communities.

President Biden's Executive Order rightly recognized the critical role mature and old-growth forests play as a natural climate solution, and the urgent need to confront the threats forests face. One of the most pressing threats to older forests is federally sanctioned logging, currently underway or under development. Restoration forestry has an important role, but losing more of our mature and old-growth trees and forests to logging would be unconscionable.

If we are to do all we can - and must - to limit atmospheric carbon levels and protect remaining critical wildlife habitat, mature and old-growth forest protections must be made durable in a formal rule, so that they will better endure into the future. Please act quickly to provide an opportunity for public engagement and environmental review of such protections, so they can be finalized and made durable.

The US Department of Agriculture and US Department of Interior, working together, can quickly act to define mature forests and trees as 80 years or older, and to permanently end the avoidable loss of their critically important carbon, water, and wildlife values to opportunistic, ill-considered logging and other threats.

At the end of a scorching week of unlikely high temperatures for the Pacific Northwest, clouds moved in above the evergreens, and I felt we were saved -- at least for now -- and snapped this photo. Please preserve our forests as one of our most vital resources for the preservation of our species and life on this planet as we have known it.

Sincerely,