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Comments: Definitions of old-growth forests should be tied to the ages of the oldest trees present. However, a definition that also includes the numbers of those trees per land unit (acre, hectare) or percentage canopy cover needs to reflect historical conditions before European settlement. Native burning and lightning started fires were the major disturbance shaping these pre-settlement forests. The expulsion of native Americans and the subsequent era of active fire suppression has caused major changes to these forests. In many areas the result has been many more trees per acre, higher levels of canopy cover, and a lack of regeneration of fire-tolerant tree species. In other words, the old-growth forests of today are often much different than those of the past.

In order to restore these forests to conditions closer to the historical norm, combinations of thinning (commercial and non-commercial) and prescribed fire are needed. This may involve the harvest of large, old trees which are much more numerous on the landscape than they used to be due to a lack of fire. These treatments can make these old-growth forests more resistant to high-severity wildfire as well as the changing climatic conditions in the future. If a definition of old-growth forest includes tree densities and canopy cover that reflect today's conditions instead of historic conditions, it may result in forests classified as old-growth forests now being classified as non-old-growth forests post-restoration. This could result in barriers to forest restoration and the subsequent loss of those old-growth stands to fire and disturbances associated with climate change.