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Comments: Thank you for taking the next steps to advance President Biden's Executive Order on Strengthening the Nation's Forests, Communities, and Local Economies.

For the purpose of protecting these climate-critical trees and forests from logging, "mature" should be defined as 80 years and older. By setting logging limits using this definition, federal agencies will establish a safety net that assures minimum protection of the ecological and carbon benefits these older forest elements provide for future generations. These older forests and big trees collectively contain the bulk of the carbon already stored in federal forests and they continue to sequester carbon at high rates far into the future. They also provide, across forest types, vital habitat and biodiversity benefits, and important sources of drinking water for communities. Critically, protecting mature forests and trees today will provide the foundation to recover old-growth ecosystems which have largely been lost to logging across the landscape.

In Kentucky's Daniel Boone National Forest, there are an estimated 430,000 acres over 80 years old, comprising about 60% of the forest. About 100,000 acres of mature and old-growth forests have been cut since 1980; making up about 15% of the Daniel Boone National Forest. We must preserve what we have left!

Protecting trees in the Daniel Boone National Forest over 80 years old will benefit the many species of conservation concern that depend on the mature and old-growth forests found here, such as:

Threatened and endangered Indiana, northern long-eared, and gray bats

Numerous species of birds that are suffering from habitat loss such as the Cerulean Warbler, Wood Thrush, and Red-headed woodpecker

Medicinal and culturally significant plants like ginseng and goldenseal

The endemic Pine Mountain tigersnail, which is mostly associated with old growth

In addition, the Daniel Boone National Forest is home to old-growth and culturally significant trees, such as the largest known Red Hickory tree, located in an old-growth forest in an area of the Redbird district that is marked for cutting.

As an herbalist, I am also economically dependent upon species that live in the mature forests of the Daniel Boone. Stopping logging of these areas will help prevent habitat loss and ensure sustainable harvest in a quickly growing industry.

In summary, I urge the US Department of Agriculture and US Department of Interior to work together to soon initiate a rulemaking based on a definition of mature forests and trees as 80 years and older, to permanently end the avoidable loss of their critically important carbon, water, and wildlife values to logging.