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Comments: To my friends in the U.S. Forest Service,

Please conduct a comprehensive inventory of mature and old-growth piñon pine and juniper forests on the Colorado Plateau during this first stage of implementing the president's executive order. It is important that ALL old-growth and mature forests, in dryland ecosystems as well as the better-known alpine and Pacific Northwest environments, are conserved for the benefit of wildlife, air and water quality, climate adaptation, and so much more.

Covering 15% of the land area in five states - Arizona, Colorado, Nevada, New Mexico, and Utah, piñon pine and juniper forests are subject to temperature extremes and limited moisture availability. These forests are often the sole woodland provider of wildlife habitat, vegetative cover, watershed protection, and traditional food and medicine gathering in dryland and arid BLM-managed lands across the West.

Single-leaf piñon pine trees can reach ages of up to 600 years and juniper can reach ages of up to 1,600 years. These historic forests and associated undisturbed biological soil crusts store a disproportionate amount of carbon in dryland ecosystems, and are more resistant to disruptions caused by climate change.

Old-growth piñon-juniper forests are home to more than 70 bird species and are often the only suitable habitat for many of these species, whose populations are currently declining rapidly under intense pressure from climate change, development, and drought.

These, and the forests of the Northwest, must be protected if we are to protect the United States and the entire planet from the rapidly advancing disaster of climate change.

Thank you for considering my comments.

Sincerely, James L. Boone