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Comments: The preservation of old-growth forest eco-systems is critical for sustaining humans and biodiversity, especially in the face of global climate change.

Old-growth forests should be defined on the timescale over which trees and forests change, grow, and mature; this may be a timescale of many decades to several hundred years.

Old-growth forests not only store carbon in their own bark, leaves, and needles but also enhance critical carbon storage in forest soils. Mature and old-growth forests store more carbon per unit area than any other land cover in the U.S in both living trees and large dead and down trees which undergo only very slow decay.

Old-growth forests protect watersheds and lower water temperatures in nearby streams, and regulate water flows.

Old-growth forests provide wildlife corridors and help protect biodiversity and habitat for threatened species.

Old-growth forests help people breathe easier, both by directly intercepting particulate air pollution and absorbing dangerous gases like nitrogen dioxide and ozone.

Intact and conserved old-growth forests also help slow the spread of wildlife-transmitted infectious diseases.

Jerry Franklin, Professor Emeritus, School of Environmental and Forest Sciences at the University of Washington, believes that in some forests of the West, mature trees that have naturally regenerated and are 100 years or older should be considered old-growth forests.

In forests that frequently see fire, fire-resilient trees of at least 150 years of age should be protected as old-growth forests while still allowing selective work to be done to reduce the risk of future blazes. It is imperative that we maintain and restore more naturally resilient (old-growth) forest conditions using prescribed fire, managed wildfire, and selective thinning where appropriate.

According to one estimate, stands of century-old forest now account for only 7% of forest cover in the United States (USDA-FS 2000).

The University of Michigan says:

"Since 1600, 90% of the virgin forests that once covered much of the lower 48 states have been cleared away. Most of the remaining old-growth forests in the lower 48 states and Alaska are on public lands. In the Pacific Northwest, about 80% of this forestland is slated for logging."

USGS reports that "Before European settlement, forests covered nearly one billion acres of what is now the United States." Data from the UN Forest Resource Assessment 2005 showed that only 257, 439,329 acres (104,182,000 ha) of "primary" forests remain in the US (defined as where there are no clearly visible indications of human activities and the ecological processes are not significantly disturbed). This would indicate that roughly only 25.7% of the US original forest cover remains as "primary" forest.

These calculations show that time is running out to preserve the last remaining old-growth forests. Hopefully, we still have time to halt and reverse the damages already inflicted.

Old-growth forests provide numerous ecological, economic, and aesthetic benefits that exceed the values of short-term timber production. Please help preserve OG forests for the future of humanity and wildlife; future generations will thank you.