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Comments: Dear Secretary Vilsack and Secretary Haaland,

There are numerous logging projects across the PNW that target mature and old-growth trees. These forests collectively contain the bulk of the carbon already stored in federal forests and they continue to sequester carbon at high rates. If continued logging of these trees is allowed, the vital role they play in the fight against climate change will be eliminated.

For the purpose of protecting these climate-critical forests from logging, 'mature' should be defined as trees 80 years old. Many forests in the Pacific Northwest are fire prone, and wildfire potential will increase with climate change. However, several studies over the past decade have found that older forests are more fire resilient than younger, second growth forests. Using an 80 year definition framework as a benchmark would capture the most fire resistant trees and carbon storing forests. Land management can be directed toward protecting homes and communities from wildfire and forest resiliency projects that help safeguard older forests. Exceptions for logging trees over 80 years must be scientifically defensible, while protecting biodiversity values and encouraging management that restores older forest character.

Old-growth forests of the Pacific Northwest are some of the best in the world for carbon storage and sequestration. The older trees in our nation's forests are climate champions-absorbing and storing carbon for centuries, and helping slow down climate change. Old forests with fire resistant trees can also help buffer communities from extreme wildfires. The Biden administration must do everything it can to ensure lasting protections for our remaining mature and old-growth forests.

My family and I urge the USDA and DOI to work together to create durable policies based on a definition of mature forests and trees of 80 years, to permanently end the avoidable loss of their critically important carbon, water and wildlife values to logging.

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