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Comments:

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on Executive Order 14072 and how it relates to mature forests on public land and economic development in the Red River Gorge area of eastern Kentucky.

I am an ecologist, a recreational rock climber, and an outdoor enthusiast. I visit the Daniel Boone National Forest and surrounding areas weekly and have worked there in the past with the Indiana bat. Through the Red River Gorge Climbers Coalition, I volunteer regularly in the area, building trails and other land management activities.

As many traditional industries decline, outdoor recreation has been a source of growth. An Eastern Kentucky University economic impact study showed that 1 102,000 rock climber visits in 2020 contributed \$8.7 million to the area economy. That growth is supported by mature forests.

Growing this part of the area economy is best advanced by protecting area forests from logging, and by defining "mature" as 80 years and older. Much of the Daniel Boone National Forest contains forests less than 80 years in age; those areas are sufficient to meet the Forest Service's goal of supplying reliable timber reserves. With the explosion of the area's outdoor recreation and the desire of those visitors to experience nature, mature trees and biodiversity in older portions of the forests can serve their highest and best use through preservation.