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Comments: Dear Secretary Vilsack and Secretary Haaland,

I moved to the Northwest for the trees. When I drove Highway 101 along Washington's coast, both sides of the highway were lined with enormous trees. It was like driving through a cathedral. That was fifty years ago. Fifty years later, those old growth trees are long gone along with at least 90% of the trees that once covered much of Washington's landscape. We now know the value of these trees with the role they play in sequestering carbon and protecting against fire, and as habitat for species largely dependent on these trees. The logging of these trees must stop.

I am asking that as you advance President Biden's Executive Order on Strengthening the Nation's Forests, Communities, and Local Economies, you do so in a way that will fulfill the President's directive to provide lasting protections for these trees.

Protecting the remaining mature and old-growth forests and trees is one of the simplest and most cost-effective climate policies the U.S. can deploy at scale. Communities throughout the Pacific Northwest (PNW) are threatened by climate-driven wildfires. By protecting our oldest, biggest trees that are most resistant to wildfire, we are also ensuring community safety and protection.

While EO 14072 correctly enumerates the many threats that climate change-enhanced drought and disturbances pose to mature and old-growth forests, it erroneously fails to include on-going logging as a threat to older federal forests and trees. There are numerous logging projects across the PNW that target mature and old-growth trees that underscore this point. 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.

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.

In summary, 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. We are approaching the point of no return with climate change. Saving every mature tree and forest is paramount to the fight for our planet.

Thank you for your consideration.