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Organization:

Title:

Comments: Dear Secretary Vilsack and Secretary Haaland,

Thank you for taking the next steps to advance President Biden's Executive Order on Strengthening the Nation's Forests, Communities, and Local Economies.

In Carson City, NV where I live, for the last two years the California wildfires have brought so much dense smoke that it blackened our skies and turned the sun a sickish red for months in the summer and fall, leaving ash on our windows, gardens and cars. So far this summer is better, but it's still August and the fire season ain't over till it's over. For the first time I can remember in my 64 years many of our friends and neighbors are seriously talking about moving somewhere north if this keeps up.

In light of these current climate-change impacts, the President's Order is a good start. It will protect forests on public lands for their many benefits in sequestering carbon to slow climate change, in providing habitat for wildlife and ecological diversity, in preserving a valuable bank of natural chemicals for development of future drugs, and for recreation and spiritual well-being for stressed humans (myself included) who stare at computer screens too much these days. Targeting the preservation of mature and old-growth trees is especially critical, as those trees provide an outsized contribution to each of the benefits listed above.

However, with the current rapidly changing climate, this is the time for an even bolder, broader-reaching Order that would establish a moratorium on all commercial logging on public lands. Not only the mature and old-growth trees help reduce the impacts of climate change -- all trees do that, and even the younger trees do it much better than any carbon sequestering method humankind has come up with. Plus it's nature's off-the-shelf technology that can be implemented immediately. While sequestering carbon and refreshing our oxygen supply, trees also support wildlife and ecological diversity, provide recreational possibilities and restore peace of mind among humans. What other climate-change action can do all that for so little cost? It's time to think outside of the box and do what we can to INCREASE our acreage of forests on public lands, not just to preserve some of the existing mature and old-growth trees. We need to THINK BIGGER to make up for the annual loss of trees from wildfire, disease and logging.

According to this USFS website: <https://www.fs.usda.gov/managing-land/private-land>, "Private forest lands ... provide over 90 percent of our domestically-produced forest products, including the timber needed to build homes and fuel wood for heating them," and "support 2.4 million jobs primarily in rural communities." Therefore, a moratorium on commercial logging on public lands would affect only 10% of our current forest products industry. While this will be hard for those currently employed cutting timber on public lands, it's the lesser of two evils in the fight against climate change; if we don't take such measures to preserve and expand forests on public lands there will be more citizens than that losing their jobs due to climate change impacts (draught, hurricanes, floods, heat waves, etc.) or just quitting to move north and get away from the heat, draught, and smoke. Where will they go? Let's just say that Alaska and Canada are looking better all the time, at least for relief from the heat and draught -- those places have their own wildfire problems, but not as bad as California.

If we take bold action now to protect forests on public lands, we will reduce the economic, environmental and human costs of climate change. And perhaps we won't force as many of our citizens into the economic and emotional chaos of uprooting and moving north, or what might be an even worse scenario: staying put and suffering the climate-change consequences at home.

Sincerely,

Thomas Gray
Carson City, NV