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Comments: Forest Plan amendments should direct forest managers to maximize the percentage of mature and old growth trees without reducing the current percentage of mature and old growth trees. Short term reductions will not compensate for long term gains as we are at or near a tipping point where exponential global warming will occur. We need to retain all mature and old growth trees as a carbon sink and to provide shade cover that reduces evaporative loss and decreases ambient temperature.

Indiana mature and old growth forests are some of the most stable and should not be harvested to improve forest health. Efforts to protect forests at high fire risk may fail, making the low risk forests more important to preserve.

Special considerations should be made to preserve forests that are in watersheds that are the source for municipal drinking water. As warming increases evaporation, the shade of mature trees and the retention of moisture layer reduces evaporative losses, therefore stabilizing the water supply.

Current plans to harvest mature and old-growth trees should be paused until plan amendments are in place. The uncertainty of projects that reduce existing stands to improve the composition of future stands must be weighed against the certainty that existing stands are needed to buffer against the climate crisis that is here today.