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First name: Cynthia

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Organization:

Title:

Comments: Dear U.S. Forest Service,

I live in the mountains of NC and I am writing to you as a parent, a grandparent, a gardener, a bird watcher, a hiker, a swimmer, and a lover of wildlife. I value clean air, clean water, and the lakes, streams, forests, gardens and green spaces that future generations need to survive. I am a Garden Club of America member, as well as volunteering for several local organizations including the Monarch Waystation, the Treasured Tree Alliance, the Black Mountain Beautification Committee, and the Greenways Foundation.

I am writing to thank you and express my support for your proposal to conserve and steward old-growth forests on national forests and grasslands by amending forest management plans nationwide in accordance with President Biden's Executive Order. Under the deeply flawed Nantahala-Pisgah National Forest management plan that was adopted early in 2023, more than 100,000 acres of old-growth forests, natural heritage areas, roadless areas, and sensitive habitats were placed in zones that are open to commercial logging. I am requesting that the management plan be amended to protect these areas of old-growth and mature forest from commercial logging and emphasize the restoration of wildfire resilience and old-growth across the plan area.

Nearly three-quarters of public lands today prioritize logging, extraction of oil and gas, and grazing over protection of natural resources. Most of our public lands are being intensively and industrially plundered by private entities. According to the Forest Service's own visitor data, nearly all national forest visitors prioritize water, wildlife, and recreation-three pillars of the Forest Service's multiple-use mandate. Yet the Forest Service continues to devote most of its energy, staff, budget, and resources to timber harvests.

National forest timber sales lose money. The Forest Service spends billions of federal tax dollars and sacrifices our national forest resources to subsidize the timber industry. Private timber companies cut down national forests for big profits at the taxpayers' expense. We get nothing but dead, denuded landscapes, pesticide runoff, invasive species, highly flammable slash, and sediment-choked streams. We don't need national forests for timber. More than 90% of furniture, paper, and other wood products come from private forests.

Logging on public lands is accelerating in spite of scientific evidence supporting the protection of old growth forests as a critical part of our climate solution. Publicly owned national forests are where most of the country's old growth forests, scenic vistas, biological diversity, recreational opportunities, and drinking water are found. National forests are the largest provider of drinking water in the country. Our government officials need to understand that our forests are worth more standing.

I strongly support policies that prioritize the management of national forests for climate resilience and the protection and conservation of mature and old growth forests. Here are some key reasons why old growth and mature forests contribute to climate resiliency:

1. Carbon sequestration: Old growth forests store large amounts of carbon dioxide, helping to mitigate climate change by reducing greenhouse gas emissions and preventing their release into the atmosphere.
2. Biodiversity conservation: These forests provide critical habitat for numerous plant and animal species, many of which are threatened or endangered. Preserving their habitats ensures the continued existence of these species and promotes overall ecosystem health.
3. Watershed protection: Old growth forests act as natural filters, improving water quality and regulating water flow, which is essential for maintaining healthy rivers, streams, and groundwater supplies.
4. Resilience to extreme weather events: The complex structure of old growth forests provides protection against extreme weather events such as hurricanes, floods, and wildfires. Their dense canopy helps reduce soil erosion and prevent the loss of valuable topsoil.
5. Adaptation to climate change: Old

growth forests have a greater capacity to adapt to changing climatic conditions due to their diverse tree species and age-class distribution. This makes them more resilient in the face of climate-related disturbances. To ensure the protection of old growth forests, I strongly recommend implementing a ban on logging in these areas.

Logging old growth forests not only leads to the permanent loss of unique ecosystems but also disrupts the delicate balance of nature and undermines efforts to combat climate change. In addition to the ban on logging old growth forests, I suggest implementing the following specific guidelines and management practices to protect these valuable ecosystems:

1. Establish strict buffer zones around old growth forests to prevent encroachment and disturbance from logging activities or any other human interventions.
2. Conduct regular monitoring and assessment of old growth forests to track their health, biodiversity, and carbon storage capacity. This will inform management decisions and ensure the implementation of appropriate conservation measures.
3. Implement controlled burns and selective thinning practices where necessary to mimic natural disturbance processes and maintain the ecological integrity of old growth forests.

By adopting these guidelines and practices, we can ensure the long-term protection and conservation of our old growth forests, contributing to climate resilience and the preservation of these remarkable ecosystems for future generations.

The amendments proposed by the Forest Service should create standards for the protection of all old-growth forests on National Forest Lands. It's important that the new rule is strong enough to protect the rich biodiversity of our region and to keep these massive carbon stores firmly rooted in the soil to mitigate climate change and flexible enough to allow for the restoration of old-growth stand structure and wildfire resilience.

Thank you for considering my comment.

Sincerely,

Cynthia Simonds