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Comments: Chief Moore and USFS Staff,

Old-growth and mature forests are irreplaceable homes to wildlife and birds. Threats to birds and other wildlife are increasing every year as habitat loss and fires directly kill wildlife and indirectly kill them by destroying their habitat. In addition to protecting homes for wildlife, old-growth and mature forests retain and enhance carbon storage, conserve biodiversity, mitigate wildfire risks, enhance climate resilience, provide outdoor recreational opportunities, and promote sustainable local economic development. The fear-mongering false narrative about the need to log or thin old-growth and mature forests to reduce the threat of wildfires is non-scientific and financially motivated which is resulting in government sanctioned clear-cuts and a handout to the timber industry which is frothing at the mouth for the opportunity to log our old-growth forests. As a botanist, I have recently witnessed the devastation of both wildfire and logging. Recent USFS clear cuts to reduce the "threat" of wildfire, or to log post-fire "hazard trees" is an example of this handout and must not be allowed to be the new normal. Following the August 2023 Smith River Complex Fire, I saw 400 year old Douglas firs and Port Orford cedars get logged along the beautiful Smith River in northern California because they were labeled "hazard trees". These trees are resilient and, with only a fraction of their lower canopies burned, they would have easily survived the fire. Those trees and the habitat they provided are gone forever. The major ground disturbance from the logging will provide perfect conditions for highly flammable, non-native weedy vegetation to colonize which will contribute to increased fire frequency while providing no habitat value for wildlife. It is tragedy that the USFS is currently allowing these practices. Without a major shift in policy toward protection of ALL old-growth and mature forests, this timber free-for-all will continue at the expense of wildlife and biodiversity. I urge you to take strong decisive measures to protect ALL of our remaining old-growth and mature forests in the United States.

Old growth forests are cool, shady, moist, high-biodiversity forests whose high canopies are relatively resistant to wildfire. By contrast, 2nd and 3rd growth forests are drier, dense and crowded with higher temperatures, abundant downed wood and have much lower biodiversity and are much more flammable - those forests must be managed and thinned. Because old-growth forests are fragmented and surrounded by logged 2nd and 3rd growth forests, their perimeters burn hotter and they become more susceptible to high severity wildfire and burn much hotter than they would naturally. The best way to "manage" our remaining old-growth forests is to leave them alone and manage the 2nd and 3rd growth forests and other logged and disturbed lands around their perimeter. If we thoughtfully manage those areas, then we can protect the core old-growth forests.

We must be the example for developing countries to follow. If you don't protect what is left now, there will be nothing left to protect in the near hot-burning future. Thank you for listening to the advice of scientists and choosing wildlife over financially motivated, non-science based alternatives.

Sincerely and with great hope,

Melissa Lippincott