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First name: Kevin

Last name: McIntyre

Organization:

Title:

Comments: Thank you for the opportunity to comment and thank you for the spirit of your efforts to conserve mature and old growth forests. Of particular interest to me are the longleaf pine and longleaf pine/oak forest types as defined by FIA that are found in the SE US. This is especially relevant since most of the remaining examples of mature longleaf are found on federally-owned lands. After reviewing the executive order and supporting materials, I would like to provide the following comments:

1) Longleaf pine forests require continual, ongoing management. The natural disturbance process that historically structured and maintained this ecosystem was frequent, low intensity fire. Today, prescribed fire is the surrogate for this natural process. It is imperative that this policy encourage, rather than restrict in any way, the ability to apply frequent prescribed fire.

2) Because of fire suppression, or inadequate intensity or frequency of prescribed fire, many of the remaining mature longleaf stands are well outside the historic range of variation and/or desired forest structure and composition. Reintroduction of fire alone is not enough to return these stands to desired conditions. Mechanical and/or chemical treatments are often required to restore historic forest structure and composition to a point where prescribed fire can begin to do its job. Please ensure that these policies will allow managers and restoration professionals to utilize the full suite of needed tools to properly restore and steward these systems into true old growth. These include, but are not limited to, harvest/removal/manipulation of: offsite pine species, invasive native hardwoods, invasive exotics, encroaching midstory and woody shrubs, and active restoration of native herbaceous understory.

3) I encourage more funding for restoration of longleaf pine on public lands. DoD, NFS, NWRs, and other federal lands are the last bastion of opportunity to manage these systems at long time scales - your lands are the conservation estate that will carry longleaf pine into mature and old growth examples of these ecosystems.

4) Consider revisiting the numbers given for age of canopy for longleaf. Longleaf can live to be ~500 years of age, so 80 year old trees might not be considered by many to be "old growth".

5) Again, I applaud what you are trying to do here, but with longleaf, it is essential that managers have the flexibility to do the right thing for the overall health of these systems. Please ensure that this is not taken away.

Thank you.