

Data Submitted (UTC 11): 2/1/2024 6:17:01 PM

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Comments: Dear Ms Linda Walker,

I am grateful for the step your agency is taking to protect old growth forests in national lands. Due to intensive logging and development our old growth forests have shrunk to under 20% of national lands. I strongly support a consistent federal policy that protects all old-growth forests and trees and significantly increases their abundance and distribution across our country.

Considering that old-growth forests are critical to our climate by storing large amounts of carbon, critical for supporting biological diversity and critical for oxygen production, it is vital that we not only protect old-growth forests, but that we also allow depleted areas to fully recover, I encourage your proposed amendment to set clear benchmarks for occurrence, arrangement, and connectivity of mature and old-growth forest conditions across the landscape for ecological integrity.

The EIS needs to consider alternatives that significantly strengthen old-growth forests by severely and intelligently limiting the stated exceptions to protections. For example, older forests in wet areas such as the Tongass where fire is rare, should be retained for biodiversity and climate considerations.

Added to this, existing old-growth definitions need critical review to ensure they are consistent with best available scientific information, inclusive of all forest conditions and practical for consistent application. Also, the national forest plan amendment must incorporate strong monitoring and accountability measures to track the abundance and distribution of mature as well as old-growth forests, and for ensuring their value as a natural carbon solution is optimized over time.

It is vital that the US establishes the strongest possible safeguards of our forests to ensure they continue to capture and store carbon, sustain plants and animals and provide oxygen and clean water forever.

I appreciate the opportunity to provide feedback on this old-growth conservation proposal, and I encourage you to robustly engage with Tribal Nations, along with the public and other stakeholders.

Sincerely,

JoAnne Kelly