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Comments: I am writing to provide my comments on the U.S. Forest Service's recently released Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) concerning the conservation and monitoring of old-growth forests. As a Christian deeply committed to the protection and healing of God's Creation, I commend the Forest Service for taking this important step towards fulfilling President Biden's Executive Order to strengthen the nation's forests. However, I believe that the final policy must be significantly improved to provide robust and lasting protections for mature and old-growth forests. Specifically, the final policy must include concrete actions to protect and recover old-growth forests that have been lost over the past centuries.

Mature and old-growth forests are critical for mitigating climate change, as they store 17.2 billion metric tons of carbon in the U.S. and remove 35 million metric tons of carbon from the atmosphere. Preserving these forests from logging is essential for maintaining their role in climate regulation. Older trees also retain more moisture, reducing wildfire risk, and their canopies provide shade that helps cool the climate.

These forests are vital for clean air and water, wildlife habitats, and preventing soil erosion and flooding. Logging old-growth trees to save the forest is a false solution; they are worth far more standing than as timber.

We have only a small percentage of our original forests remaining. I am concerned that old growth forests will not be sufficiently preserved. I am concerned that exploitation of forests for lesser services will be allowed to lessen their capacities for the critical roles they play towards a viable earth environment, and thus a viable human life on earth. Preservation must be maximized, exploitation profoundly diminished. Please help ensure the future of our grandchildren and their families with the forests we need for a viable climate, clean air and water, and the human adventure into natural beauty. Please prioritize more fully preservation and enduring protections.