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Comments: I am writing to respond to your recently released Draft Environmental Impact Statement concerning the conservation of old-growth forests. Thank you for your work in this area. However, I believe that the final policy should include concrete steps to protect and recover old-growth forests that have been lost as well as protecting the old forests that we have.

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

These forests protect the air and water quality, wildlife habitats, and prevent soil erosion and flooding. Logging old-growth trees hurts the environment; they are worth far more standing than as timber.

I believe that God calls us to be protective of the Earth, and supportive of the habitat that sustains us all. We have a responsibility to the Earth. Trees have a significant place in our religious tradition. They are a sacred part of God's enduring presence.

I urge the Forest Service to implement a strong policy that protects our mature and old-growth forests, enhancing the resilience and wellbeing of all of God's creation.

Thank you again for your efforts. These trees are essential for our continued human survival.

Mary Anna White