

Data Submitted (UTC 11): 7/11/2024 7:29:27 PM

First name: John

Last name: DiTillo

Organization:

Title:

Comments: Dear Esteemed Forest Service Representative,

As a member of the Indiana Forest Alliance, I support their statement regarding the "management" of mature and old growth forests in the USA and would like to add one of my own.

As a parent whose wildest dream is that my children will have a world worth living in, and in some ways will be even better than the one I inherited, I am interested primarily in the health of the forest 50 to 200 years from now and beyond. This, of course, requires doing things that make sense -- in terms of ecological integrity, in terms of climate resiliency -- now. The best thing we can do, when it comes to old growth forests, is to leave them alone. That should save you a lot of time and energy!

Under no circumstances should a one-size-fits-all plan be applied across the country for what to do in areas where mature or old-growth forests exist and how to do it. Rather, assessments and strategies should be undertaken by local, responsible, informed individuals (like those at IFA) who have the best interest of the forests and the common good in mind. Please listen to the IFA and work with them when you're deciding what to do to help Indiana's forests in the short- and long-term.

The USFS needs to take an approach that recognizes the Industrial Revolution as a blip, and a disastrous one from the perspective of an old growth forests. Keep machines out of the forests and they'll be fine. If fire is to be used, then it must only be under circumstances where it is exercised by and in the way of people who have an intimate knowledge of the place, its needs, and methods that best meet them. This is how indigenous peoples did it forever until settlers came in and started clearing the forests. This is how we need to do it from now on, if burning is deemed to be the best option, which mostly it won't. Honoring Tribal co-stewardship needs to be a priority every time a decision is made. Which Tribes will you be working with in Indiana?

Surely your dedicated team of scientists can help the administration to see that the only way for a forest to grow old is to not cut down trees. "Proactive management" is a slippery term, and while we cannot ignore the issues caused by past mistakes, such as the introduction of invasive species and the pumping of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere for the last couple hundred years, we cannot either pretend that industrial-style logging is good for forests. Time to turn a new page in the USFS playbook.

My expertise is in wetlands, but of course forests and wetlands have coexisted as interconnected entities long before the descendants of settlers and their governments started calling them by those names and trying to manage them by cutting and draining them, respectively. The research suggests that natural processes are regenerative by definition. The time to work with these processes, not against or ignorant of them, is now.

Thank you,

John DiTillo