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First name: Ken

Last name: Rawles

Organization:

Title:

Comments: Dear U.S. Forest Service,

As a resident of the McKenzie River Valley in Oregon, I am writing to express my strong support for stronger protections for old-growth and mature forests on federal lands. I have a deep investment in the well-being of these forests, both as a hiker and forager and as someone who witnessed the devastating impacts of the 2020 Holiday Farm Fire. An old-growth stand's peaceful, cathedral-like atmosphere provides a unique sense of calm and serenity.

I want to share a few personal stories and thoughts that highlight the importance of these protections:

Personal Experience and Connection:

Hiking and Foraging in Old-Growth Forests:

My wife and I enjoy hiking and foraging for wild mushrooms in the old-growth forests of the Willamette National Forest. These experiences are deeply enriching and provide an unmatched connection to nature. The towering trees, rich biodiversity, and pristine ecosystems are a sanctuary we cherish and wish to see preserved for future generations.

Impact of the Holiday Farm Fire:

The Holiday Farm Fire ravaged our home and the surrounding forests in September 2020. Witnessing the loss of so many mature and old-growth trees was heartbreaking. These forests play a crucial role in mitigating climate change's effects, providing wildlife habitat, and offering recreational opportunities that contribute to our mental and physical well-being.

Key Points and Asks:

Prohibit Logging of Old-Growth Trees:

None of the current alternatives explicitly prohibit the logging of old-growth trees. The final plan should unequivocally end the cutting and selling of old-growth trees on public lands. These forests are not just timber resources but critical for climate regulation, biodiversity, and public enjoyment.

Protect Mature Forests:

Mature forests, which have already endured significant losses due to logging, need explicit protection. These forests are the future old-growth and provide substantial climate benefits. Protecting mature forests is essential for ecological integrity and climate resilience.

Strengthen Proactive Stewardship:

While proactive stewardship is essential, it should not be an excuse for logging old-growth trees. The final policy must eliminate the agency's discretion to log old growth under the guise of stewardship. Active management should prioritize conservation and restoration without compromising the integrity of these ancient ecosystems.

Ensure Durability of Protections:

The final policy must ensure that protections for old-growth forests are durable and not subject to change at the discretion of local line officers. Clear, consistent standards are needed to prevent the erosion of these protections over time.

Address Climate Mitigation:

The draft proposals largely overlook the role of old-growth forests in carbon sequestration and climate mitigation. Protecting these forests is a critical natural climate solution that can have a meaningful impact on the climate crisis.

Conclusion:

Conserving mature and old-growth forests is a moral imperative for future generations. The U.S. Forest Service has a unique opportunity to establish meaningful and lasting protections to safeguard these irreplaceable ecosystems. I urge you to adopt a modified Alternative 3, ending the cutting of old-growth trees and ensuring that these forests remain standing for the benefit of all.

Thank you for considering my comments. Together, we can ensure that our national forests continue to provide invaluable benefits in terms of climate regulation, biodiversity, and natural beauty.

Sincerely,
Ken Rawles
Vida, Oregon