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Comments: We must preserve our remaining mature and old-growth trees and forests, as they play a crucial role in protecting our climate, filtering drinking water, providing wildlife habitats, and offering numerous other essential benefits.

The current draft proposal permits old-growth trees to be processed at mills and allows agency staff to manage old-growth forests out of existence under the guise of "proactive stewardship" goals. Additionally, the draft contains ambiguous language that could justify continued commercial logging of old growth in the Tongass.

I urge you to strengthen the proposal by:

1. Prohibiting the cutting of old-growth trees in all national forests and forest types, and ending the cutting of any trees in old-growth stands in moist forest types.
2. Banning any commercial exchange of old-growth trees. Even in rare cases where an old-growth tree must be cut (e.g., for public safety), that tree should not be sent to the mill.
3. Protecting mature forests and trees - the future old growth - from the threat of commercial logging to recover old growth lost to past mismanagement. This protection can be achieved in a manner consistent with addressing fire threats.

It is crucial to ensure the protection of our oldest trees and forests. Failing to do so undermines the objectives of this amendment, contravenes Executive Order 14072, and disregards the over 500,000 public comments received on last summer's advance notice of proposed rulemaking.

For the benefit of all, especially the young people who rely on the climate protections and other benefits that forests provide, please strengthen the amendment to protect mature and old-growth forests.

Thank you.