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First name: Nicole

Last name: Martel

Organization:

Title:

Comments: Dear U.S. Forest Service,

Thank you very much for taking the time to read and consider my letter.

My name is Nicole Martel, and I deeply care for the health and well-being of our beloved forests, wildlife, and planet. I am part of a growing collective of people who are beginning to realize what is happening, and how important our forests and trees are alive, not as a crop or resource for commercial purposes. I understand that there are varying viewpoints and beliefs in this regard, and yet science, nature, common sense, and our direct experience are all speaking very loudly at the moment. Something needs to change in our system.

Yet, I know that there are many people that feel caught within our current practices. They feel a sincere stirring for honest change, greater goodwill and fulfillment for all of life on this planet. People are seeing what really matters, and where true responsibility, value, care, and integrity are paramount. There is more to this life than meets the eye, and when we save wildlife, we save ourselves.

As someone deeply committed to the preservation of our national forests, I am writing to express my strong support for the protection of mature and old-growth forests.

The Forest Service's proposed Nationwide Forest Plan Amendment is an important opportunity to safeguard these critical ecosystems. However, I am concerned that the current proposal contains major loopholes that could allow for the continued logging of mature and old-growth trees under the misguided pretense of wildfire mitigation or so-called "forest health". The proposal MUST be dramatically strengthened to provide real protections and prevent ALL logging of old-growth forests.

Mature and old-growth trees are essential not only for their unparalleled carbon sequestration capabilities but also for their role in providing habitat for endangered species, supporting healthy watersheds, and enhancing forest resilience to wildfire. The vast majority of remaining old-growth forest on the Central Coast of California is within the Los Padres National Forest. These forests must be protected from the threat of logging. And while this proposed amendment would only affect old-growth forest, mature forests (which are poised to become old-growth in the coming decades) need to be protected as well.

I urge you to revise the proposed amendment to close these loopholes and ensure that both mature and old-growth trees in the Los Padres National Forest and across the country are truly protected.

Please take decisive action to protect these invaluable resources for current and future generations.

There is nothing more valuable than our irreplaceable intact, healthy ecosystems and forests. I have known this for a long time, and I am grateful that more people are waking up to the critical need to protect every remaining forest. Our consumption, greed, and disconnection from the natural world to satisfy a false sense of comfort, growth, and power is destroying life itself. Yet, we continue with this addictive and deadly cycle because we are afraid of change and to stand up for what is right. We have brainwashed ourselves. Currently, there are so many urgent and dire issues, too many to name here. Yet the most effective and powerful solution is also available and simple if we let it be. Right now, protecting old-growth and mature forests is one of the best solutions to the climate crisis. This is obvious to anyone who knows the dynamics of nature and climate change, which I am sure includes you. We don't have the luxury of ignorance, denial, or false information anymore. This was an urgent issue years ago, let alone now.

Some say we have an over dependency on timber as a species and we can't change that. But that does not make it right when life as we know it is at stake. We can change. We can collaborate. We can cooperate. There are other alternatives, we simply need to make the effort to implement them and transition to healthier, sustainable practices.

There are many specific obstacles that are standing in the way of our vision and values to support a safe, healthy environment. In this instance, the problem is corporate interests that want to continue logging our forests rather than protect and conserve them. Thankfully, you have the power to change our dangerous trajectory and do the right thing for people and the planet.

There is a great deal of false information out there that our current logging practices are sustainable because of replanting. But it is important to note that current timber and logging practices cause irreversible damage. Not to mention that it is a standard practice to heavily saturate a forest area with pesticides after it has been logged. This kills, sterilizes, and prevents most life from returning except the replanted conifers. Unfortunately, this permanently destroys the health of the soil and the biodiversity needed for a forest to be considered a "forest". What is left by these practices is a "plantation" or mono-crop of timber, and even the conifer trees themselves are weakened and unhealthy due to the lack of biodiversity needed for their well-being.

Our current logging practices are not sustainable. Worse, the use of pesticides is even more dangerous and destructive because of the permanent damage they cause, not to mention how toxic they are to humans, wildlife, and the planet. Logging/Timber companies seem to be targeting our remaining natural forests, even though they have plenty of plantation sites they can log. This means we are about to be left with only plantation trees, instead of true forests. Many people are unaware that we are losing the remaining second generation or "real" forests at an alarming rate. However, when people become more aware of what is really happening, we can stop these destructive practices before it's too late. Our remaining forests are not getting the protection they need. Sadly, it seems that our government agencies are greenwashing, misleading, and promoting these unhealthy and unsustainable practices. The misinformation out there is extreme.

We need to do something now. Once these areas are logged and sprayed, we can't go back.

Please respect that the people have put the trust of our natural world in your hands.

Please stop old-growth and mature trees from going to the mill. There is broad agreement that what we have left is too precious to cut.

The clock is ticking, thousands of acres of forest are being logged every month. We must act now.

Lay groundwork for durable protections for mature forests, to ensure that they are able to develop into our next

generation of old-growth forests.

Despite being cherished across the country, old-growth forests on federal lands remain unprotected from logging.

Most Americans don't know this, but I am learning that National Forests are managed very differently than our National Parks. National Forests are within the Department of Agriculture - and treated just like a crop. That's just wrong. Especially for mature and old-growth forests!

Our justifications and corruption for money and power needs to stop.

There are countless reasons as to why our forests are critical to save. They help clean and filter our air, prevent soil erosion, regenerate the soil, hold cleaner water, balance weather systems, and store carbon to name just a few of the vital benefits forest provide. The carbon storage of these forests alone should be reason enough to protect them. This is essential for mitigating our climate crisis and sustaining life on our planet. Old-growth and mature trees store much more carbon than younger forests. One study found that the three biggest trees across six forests in Oregon stored 42% of the carbon. If logged, the carbon stored in these trees would be released into the atmosphere. Carbon storage is recognized throughout the world as an essential practice.

Our forests function as irreplaceable reservoirs of biological diversity: Being home to countless native plants, fungi, and wildlife species.

Another reason that biological diversity is important through protecting our forests is because it prevents non-native, invasive species from taking over and completely disrupting the natural stability and health of an ecosystem. For example, invasive grasses are more flammable, and a major concern given the increase in wildfires. Our natural, intact ecosystems hold more moisture and density, therefore much more resilient to fire than logged or thinned areas. When we log our forests, we invite invasive, non-native species to come in.

Please realize how extremely valuable our forests are alive. They Provide[hellip]

o Clean Water

? For more than half of the population of the United States, clean water doesn't start at the tap - it starts in a nearby National Forest.

o Carbon Storage and Climate Solutions

? Forests are one of the most efficient, scalable, and cost-effective ways we have to absorb and store carbon - period.

? According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, which is specifically dedicated to advancing climate change science: "Forestry can make a very significant contribution to a low-cost global mitigation portfolio that provides synergies with adaptation and sustainable development. However, this opportunity is being lost in the current institutional context and lack of political will to implement and has resulted in only a small portion of this potential being realized at present."

? Protecting forests is not only a low-cost carbon solution but also one that boosts climate adaptation and sustainable development.

? The science is clear, the best tool for addressing carbon pollution is also the oldest - our trees and forests.

o Wildlife Habitat

? Protecting our forests keeps more than trees standing - it preserves vital habitat for the wildlife we love.

? More than 3,000 species of wildlife live within our National Forests!

? Right now, the U.S. loses a football field worth of natural space to development every 30 seconds, putting countless vulnerable species at risk of extinction.

o Outdoor Recreation

? Protecting our forests is an investment in our economy and expands outdoor equity.

? In 2019, Forest Service lands tallied 150 million recreation visits, generated \$10.1 billion in local spending, and supported 153,800 jobs.

? 80% of outdoor activities -- from camping to fishing to sport climbing -- have seen an increase in participation in recent years, and those visiting the outdoors are becoming more diverse.

On a personal level, I can't imagine a world without these magnificent forests and trees. They are a keystone to what makes this world beautiful and meaningful, not to mention the overall health of our planet. I have so many incredible memories of inspiration, awe, support, and solace that came through my experiences in forests. There are no real words for what they share, it is more profound than anything else in my experience. If we protect these forests, future generations will be able to have these similar experiences and feel cared for and enriched through their presence.

THERE IS A SOLUTION: The U.S. Forest Service can prioritize conservation over logging and other extractive uses. PLEASE conserve old-growth and mature forests to combat the climate crisis, biodiversity loss, and the safety and health of life on our planet!

Deep Gratitude, for your recognition of this urgent issue, and remaining honest and in integrity for the greatest good.

The only true, sustainable natural resource is the care, respect, and honor of all life.

"Our task must be to free ourselves by widening our circle of compassion to embrace all living creatures, and the whole of nature and its beauty." ~ Albert Einstein

Respectfully,

Nicole G. Martel