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Title:

Comments: Thank you for opening up this public comment period on the National Old-Growth Amendment.

My name is Julie Lowe and as a citizen of the United States I value democracy, conservation of our natural resources and the ownership of our public land. I am committed to work toward a solution where the USFS can thrive and be funded aside from selling timber.

I am also committed to working on solutions to the climate crisis and the moment is right now. Mature and Old Growth forests are a big part of the solution. Right now, myself as well as many other Americans feel like the USFS and the Department of Agriculture are not understanding and not acknowledging the importance of "Mature" as well as "Old-Growth" trees and how much we value them and why. Hear our reasons because they matter. Right now we have the power to begin to heal our climate by stopping the timber sales (of any sort!) from our public lands. The timing is crucial and there is so much to lose. The solution is complex but there is a way for the USFS to continue to thrive and be funded aside from selling timber. The USDA must find a way and this amendment is the beginning of finding a solution and we can all work towards this together. Achieving this would also bring us much closer to the 30 X 30 goal. Listen to the People and step up to the crisis of our lives and offer a solution.

"It is most disheartening to see the failure of the Forest Service to listen to the public, which is vastly opposed to this project, and the abject failure of the Forest Service to act according to the overwhelming science that indicates this area should be avoided for logging." <https://www.citizen-times.com/story/opinion/2024/08/25/opinion-old-growth-forests-on-our-public-lands-must-be-protected/74734763007/>

The problem we face now are outdated policies that continue to allow logging on public land. The USFS has policies that emphasize logging and it must be amended to improve our climate instead of further degrading it. When the forest is disturbed for logging and extraction projects, the forest floor is disrupted in such a way that it takes decades to recover the mycelia networks and the life in the soil that trees and other plants need to thrive. This same network beneath the forest floor is what helps to sequester carbon and should be maintained for forest and climate health. Building roads in forests is the absolute worst thing we can do to the forest and the wildlife that need unbroken contiguous habitat to survive. Forest roads, including abandoned roads perpetuate logging, poaching and ORV use which harms natural areas.

It is my understanding that the USFS did not inventory Hardwood Forests Regions 8 and 9 and that they do not have accurate data in national forests across these two regions. Despite the inability of the USFS to comply with the full inventory it has not affected the active sale of public timber from these regions. These are my public lands and they matter! I am a stakeholder of these forests and I oppose the misrepresentation of the amount of forests that would qualify as "Mature" in a proper inventory. And I oppose that the inventory leaves out remaining patches of Old-Growth that do exist in these forests. All Old-Growth should be protected by this EO and the

USFS should not be allowed to continue to log in areas that have not been inventoried. For example, these active USFS logging and prescribed fire management projects in Indiana, the "Houston South" and the "Buffalo Springs" Projects are moving forward, despite the lack of inventory from EO14072 and despite the current NOGA public comment process. The Hoosier National Forest deserves protection from EO14072.

As I understand it, the USFS has several logging and burning management projects that are live and scheduled to go ahead across the country despite the NOGA process. Because a groundswell of public opposition has been occurring some logging projects have been ceased like in the Nantahala National Forest in North Carolina. Here in Indiana, the People have been fighting to end the Houston South Project and more recently the Buffalo Springs project in our Hoosier National Forest for years. The local USFS is well aware of public opposition in Indiana and has even lost a local lawsuit when a Bloomington, Indiana Judge ordered an injunction to cease the Houston South project due to the threat to the communities only drinking water supply. Herald Times News Article March 30th 2023: <https://www.heraldtimesonline.com/story/news/local/2023/03/30/court-injunction-halts-houston-south-project-hoosier-national-forest/70064960007/>. Despite public opposition, this summer the USFS sent out communication that both the Houston South and Buffalo Springs projects are moving forward. My personal Letter to the Editor, Republic News June 29th, 2024: <https://www.therepublic.com/2024/06/29/letter-help-protect-vanishing-hoosier-us-old-growth-forests/>

And here is the latest litigation against the USFS for the Houston South Project[hellip]Forest Service sued again in effort to stop Houston South Project: <https://tribtown.com/2024/09/16/forest-service-sued-again-to-stop-houston-south-project-in-northwestern-part-of-county/>

On July 31st, Wednesday, I attended the NOGA Field Day virtual meeting offered by the USFS. Thank you for the reports from each Region. I appreciated hearing about who joined you all for the field day and what the terrain was like. One point given to us via the webinar that I appreciated is that during the Field Day a concern from stakeholders was noted. The concern or perception by stakeholders was reported by staff that all Regions were being considered under the same fire regime or that the Eastern Hardwood Forests were being lumped in with fire management in the west. I was glad to hear it clearly stated by the USFS that this is not the case.

Also during the virtual Field Day webinar, I heard a different answer from the USFS than in the past. A statement was made by a few USFS Regional staff, that the known threats to forests are fire, insects and climate. Noticeably left out was the significant threat of "logging". Towards the end of the webinar, another staff person seemed to respond to the recognized or known threat of "logging" perhaps because of the Q/A? He said that logging used to be a threat. I disagree with this statement as logging continues to be a threat in the Hoosier National Forest in Indiana.

I heard another statement by USFS staff closer to the beginning of the webinar that I think was related to the comment about logging being acknowledged as a "prior" threat. He said that one thing they learned as a result of the Field Day is how inconsistently the forests are managed across the US. For example, in the Hoosier National Forest the USFS continues to move the Houston South Project forward despite the massive amount of push back from stakeholders including the municipal government while providing little more explanation than, "We don't need to change our actions because we use Best Management Practices and that covers it". My point is, while hearing this on the webinar that "logging was a threat but it no longer is" I am unable to trust the USFS as a

whole because of the conflict with those that manage the Hoosier National Forest and because of many other instances like it across the US.

Related, I was reading the Indiana Business Journal over the summer and I read about a visit to Brazil by the Governor of Indiana and the Director of Indiana Agriculture. The State of Indiana's partnership with the Country of Brazil is in agricultural exports, specifically soybeans, and how Indiana's crops differ from Brazil's but how together they can provide all soybean choices to the world. I read on to see a statement from the Director of Indiana Agriculture where he said to the journalist, that "we (Indiana) were recently in Dubai and we sell our hardwoods to Dubai". This is extremely upsetting to me. This is a statement from an appointed Indiana Government Official, quoted and published in a highly regarded journal that Dubai is enjoying, as an export my Yellowwood State Forest and my Owen Putnam State Forest, Morgan Monroe State Forest, Clark State Forest, Washington Jackson State Forest and on and on and on. These are all places that my family and I hike, paddle and camp and it breaks my heart with each RMG that comes out from the Indiana Division of Forestry and each DEIS from the USFS.

Solution: The USFS should prioritize Conservation over logging and other disruptive extractive uses. Remove the incentive by mandating that no Old-Growth goes to the saw mill, including standing trees, trees affected by insects and natural disturbances like tornadoes. Inventory all public lands properly and protect Mature and Old Growth Forests on public land from processes by humans as much as possible.

A Call to Action for the USFS: Conserve Mature and Old-Growth trees on federal forestland and protect and restore biodiversity while saving humans from climate catastrophe.