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Comments: As a lifelong resident of the Mountain West, including my boyhood home in Wyoming and most of my adult life in Colorado, I have a long-standing connection to and love of our forested lands. These forested lands are precious. And as climate change accelerates, they are more important now than ever before in protecting biodiversity and in acting to capture excess carbon in our atmosphere.

It is imperative that we identify and protect any old-growth forests and lands with the potential to become old-growth forests. Identifying and protecting old-growth should be a standard, not an optional practice for the Forest Service.

Humans have done so much to devastate our natural lands in the spirit of progress and commercialism. We should not view every last acre of our forests (including old-growth and potential old-growth) as consumable resources, but as amazing places to be protected for their outstanding natural values and beauty.

Our old-growth and potential old-growth forests should be off-limits to timber production, as there are plenty of other places to harvest trees. Treatments to old-growth lands should be minimized, and focused only on protecting public safety when the need is clear and urgent, repairing human caused damage such as removing unneeded roads, and removing introduced or invasive organisms as appropriate. Old-growth characteristics should be preserved and maintained as much as possible in all cases, acknowledging the exceptional conditions above. We have become so accustomed to "managing" forests that it's sometimes easy to forget that the most appropriate management for untrammelled lands is to let nature manage the forests as dictated by the ecosystems that have developed and thrived there over thousands of years.

Please consider my thoughts above as you finalize your plans for old-growth forests. If these lands are not given the protections they deserve, the natural character of these forests will likely be damaged irreparably, and we may never get another opportunity to do so.