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Comments: I am submitting my comments on the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) published on June 21, 2024, concerning the protection of mature and old-growth forests under Executive Order 14072. This is a historic opportunity to ensure the conservation of our remaining old-growth forests, including those in the eastern United States such as the Hoosier National Forest.

President Biden's Executive Order 14072 rightfully highlights the critical role forests play in addressing climate change, conserving biodiversity, and supporting local economies. According to the order, forests serve as vital carbon sinks, absorbing approximately 10% of the United States' annual economy-wide greenhouse gas emissions. The order emphasizes the need to preserve mature and old-growth forests on federal lands as a central strategy to mitigate climate risks and promote resilience against catastrophic wildfires. This policy is essential not just for the environment but for the long-term health, prosperity, and resilience of our communities.

Eastern deciduous forests, including those in the Hoosier National Forest, must be treated as an endangered ecosystem, distinct from the western forests. Mature forests need to be allowed to grow into old-growth status to comply with EO 14072. These stands play a crucial role in carbon sequestration and biodiversity and must be treated differently from younger forests due to their unique ecological characteristics. Moreover, as stated in the executive order, the threats to mature and old-growth forests, including wildfires, climate change, and disease, demand urgent action.

I urge the Forest Service to pause all current projects affecting mature and old-growth forests until appropriate amendments are made to forest management plans to align with the objectives of the executive order. The need for science-based, climate-smart forestry is clearly laid out in the order, which also calls for a public inventory of these forests and robust public input on how to best manage and protect them moving forward.

This is a rare opportunity to safeguard some of our nation's most valuable natural resources for future generations. I strongly urge the Forest Service to take these comments into account and act decisively to protect our remaining old-growth and mature forests, as envisioned in Executive Order 14072.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide input on this critical issue.