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First name: Paige

Last name: Adkins

Organization:

Title:

Comments: I am writing to express my deep concerns for the protection of old-growth forests. While the Draft Environmental Impact Statement acknowledges some of the issues surrounding old-growth forests, it falls short when it comes to many vital protections needed to safeguard these invaluable ecosystems.

I recognize the complexities involved in balancing land management with competing interests, however as a young person, I am tired of seeing commercial interests constantly win over the well-being of our environment. The rapid decline of our ecosystems and the acceleration of climate change signifies that it is time to urgently advocate for the Earth and her relatives.

The preservation of old-growth forests is critical to combatting the climate crisis. They are among the most efficient carbon sinks on the planet, provide clean drinking water, and are a safe haven for endangered species. Failure to protect old-growth forest could worsen the effects of climate change and mark yet another profound failure for future generations. The DEIS does not do enough to protect these ecosystems and contains dangerous loopholes that could allow for more destructive logging.

The DEIS must explicitly end all commercial logging in old-growth forests and close the gaps that allow for the exploitation of weak policy. While the National-Old Growth Amendment was a step in the right direction, its lack of clarity and abundant exceptions will endanger old-growth forests. Specifically, there needs to be clarification in regards to proactive stewardship. While such actions like prescribed fires may be suitable for fire-adapted forests such as those in my home of the Sierra Nevadas, they are unnecessary in wetter regions where heavy rainfall makes natural fire rare. Yet under the current amendment, one could justify such an action. Additionally, the amendment includes broad exceptions that could permit the cutting of trees for activities like recreational infrastructure, which must be revised to prevent excessive and unnecessary logging. In their current state, these exceptions are too broad and could exclude many regions of the National Forest System from old-growth policy entirely.

In this process, it is always crucial to engage meaningfully with Indigenous communities, whose knowledge of our forests is invaluable. These communities have maintained symbiotic relationships with the forests for generations, and their voices must guide decision-making if we hope to preserve old-growth forests for future generations.

Thank you for your consideration and for the essential work you do in preserving our nation's forests for generations to come.