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Comments: [External Email]Comment on Land Management Plan Direction for Old-Growth Forest Conditions Across the National Forest System #65356

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Dear U.S. Forest Service,

I'm a small business owner who believes we can achieve a just transition to a regenerative economy.

I am writing to comment on the Draft Environmental Impact Statement that was released on June 20th that has the potential to move our climate fight forward by reducing the logging of old growth in our national forests if a number of important changes are made. We call on you to realize the promise of President Biden's forest executive order by finalizing stronger standards to protect old growth, including by ending commercial logging of old growth, and by issuing strong protections for mature trees and forests from the clear and present threat of logging. Protecting and recovering these natural climate solutions would be a key pillar of U.S. climate policy and reinforce the United States' international climate leadership.

Safeguarding and expanding carbon-rich forests on Forest Service lands is one of the most important, cost-effective, and timely approaches to fighting the climate crisis. Mature and old-growth trees store and continue to absorb large amounts of carbon in addition to providing the public with clean drinking water, habitat for imperiled wildlife, and world-class recreational opportunities. Larger, older trees are also more fire resistant, and stronger protections would still allow for necessary efforts to address the risk of fire.

Unfortunately, vital mature and old growth forests and the trees within them are currently threatened by numerous proposed and ongoing logging projects, and the current proposal doesn't do enough to protect them. We need to ensure both mature and old-growth trees and forests on federal lands, including our national forests, remain in place to mitigate climate change and to maintain their natural benefits for future generations.

We ask that you strengthen the DEIS by preventing old-growth trees from being logged or sold and closing loopholes that would undermine old growth protections. The final decision also needs to be clearer about protection of the Nation's old growth crown jewel-the Tongass National Forest. The draft correctly removes an explicit Tongass exemption but includes ambiguous language that might be used to justify continued commercial logging of old growth on the Tongass. And we ask that you advance protections for mature forests-our future old growth.

Thank you for your leadership on these important issues.

Sincerely,

Ann Blake