

President Joe Biden
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, DC 20500.

April 21, 2022

Dear Mr. President:

We write as natural resource and climate scientists deeply concerned about climate impacts and threats to biodiversity from continuing deforestation and degradation. While reducing emissions is essential to combat the climate crisis, taking maximum advantage of natural climate solutions is equally indispensable. Preserving mature forests and large trees is our most effective and efficient near-term opportunity to protect and enhance the forest carbon sinks and reservoirs recognized in Article 5.1 of the Paris Climate Agreement. It also squarely responds to the recent Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change report that “Safeguarding biodiversity and ecosystems is fundamental to climate resilient development.” To avoid extreme consequences from climate change, the world must greatly improve conservation of these resources.

Older forests provide the most above-ground carbon storage potential on Earth, with mature forests and larger trees driving most accumulation of forest carbon in the critical next few decades. Left vulnerable to logging, though, they cannot fulfill these vital functions.

The United States has a profound responsibility to lead by example on forest protections if we expect other, less affluent, nations to do their essential part. Fortunately, most remaining mature forests and big trees in the U.S. grow on federal lands. This means succeeding at home and leading abroad on the critical climate front is within the immediate control of the Executive Branch. Federal land managers, however, continue to fall short in doing what they must to secure these vast carbon and biodiversity reservoirs. Too frequently, they still authorize logging of older stands and sell off large, carbon-rich trees at the expense of climate and ecosystem values.

Mr. President, you can fix this on your own without relying on an uncertain Congress. You have the authority to direct your land management agencies to undertake a joint rulemaking, securing forest carbon resources and related ecological co-benefits across federal forestlands. Much as President Clinton did with the landmark Roadless Area Conservation Rule, you can direct your land management agencies to adopt, through a robust and inclusive public process, durable regulations that end their avoidable logging of mature forests and large trees.

Protecting mature forests and large trees on federal forestlands would set an important, highly visible example for other major forest-holding nations to follow as they address climate change threats. But it would also help stem the biodiversity crisis and secure for Americans the ecosystem benefits most valued from our public forests. Older forests provide cool, shaded forest interiors for sensitive species and those needing time to migrate and adapt to changing environments. Large trees create vital habitat structure and complexity for imperiled fish, other aquatic life, and terrestrial species. They store and gradually release clean drinking water for millions of Americans while mitigating flood and fire impacts resulting from climate-driven increases in erratic and severe weather events. Finally, such forests and legacy trees attract visitors and inspire awe, supporting recreation and rural economies.

We applaud the federal government's renewed commitment under your leadership to address the existential threats of climate change and biodiversity loss. Our federal forests are critical components of those efforts. Please act as quickly as you can, to optimize their contributions as natural climate solutions so that our Nation can provide an urgently needed standard for forest protections globally.

Respectfully,¹

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