



Your Summer Report

How old forests help slow climate change

By Ellen Montgomery, director of our public lands campaign

One of our greatest natural tools for tackling the climate crisis has been right in front of us all along: our forests. Every year, forests in the United States absorb enough carbon to offset 13% of the country's carbon emissions—and if we protect them from logging, they could do so much more.

Trees remove carbon from the atmosphere and store it on a scale that can't be matched by any man-made technology. The larger the tree, the more carbon is safely stored inside. Plus, older forests have accumulated centuries of carbon in living and dead plant materials and soils.

There is no upper limit on how much carbon a tree can store over time. Each year, trees add more mass than they did the previous year, meaning they take more and more carbon out of the atmosphere as they age.

Our nation's largest trees may be superheroes when it comes to fighting the climate crisis, but even superheroes need help sometimes. Many of our nation's oldest trees are under threat from logging and development, putting our climate, as well as clean water and wildlife, at further risk.

Restoring protections for our oldest trees

That's why we celebrated in January when the Biden administration restored Roadless Rule protections for the Tongass National Forest in Alaska, an iconic temperate rainforest home to trees older than the United States itself, along with abundant salmon and wildlife.



Ellen Montgomery, director of our national public lands campaign, meets President Biden as he unveils the Camp Hale-Continental Divide National Monument. In January, the Biden administration restored Roadless Rule protections for the Tongass National Forest in Alaska.

Together with activists around the country, our advocacy for the Tongass goes back decades. In 2001, our national network helped win the original Roadless Rule. We gathered and delivered nearly 700,000 public comments—more than half of all comments submitted—from our members and supporters.

We've worked to defend the Tongass ever since, taking the Trump administration to court when it tried to resume logging in roadless areas, and rallying public support for this incredible forest. And now, the Biden administration is safeguarding this special place from development.

Continued on page 3 ►

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for making it
all possible

11 states have committed to 100% clean electricity. Who's next?

On Feb. 7, Minnesota became the 11th state in the nation to commit to 100% clean electricity, as Gov. Tim Walz signed legislation requiring the state's utilities to get 100% of their electricity from carbon-free sources by 2040. Together, the 11 states account for more than a quarter of our country's total electricity consumption.

respectively. When possible, use native species of these plants.

3. Create "bee hotels." Bees' busy lives call for some rest, and building shelters for them is quite simple. Like a birdhouse, you can construct bee houses from wood and materials easily found at craft, hobby and home improvement stores or at home.

4. Avoid using pesticides when gardening. The easiest way to help bees is by avoiding toxic chemicals that harm them.

5. Construct windbreaks. Bees' small size makes them susceptible to strong wind. You can prevent this by creating windbreaks around plants and bee houses using porous materials or objects like netting, mesh and screens.

Each action will greatly improve your yard or garden's ability to attract bountiful bees and give them a healthy habitat in which to thrive.

Victory: Bristol Bay protected from the Pebble Mine

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has issued a final determination to restrict the use of certain Bristol Bay headwaters in Alaska as a disposal site for mining dredge and fill materials, effectively preventing the proposed Pebble Mine.

The region is home to iconic wildlife including salmon, brown bears, seals, walruses, birds and more. All of that abundance would have been put at risk if the Pebble Mine had opened. The proposed project included an open pit the size of Manhattan, as well as the construction of new roads and a new pipeline.

"We are so excited that the Biden administration has fulfilled its campaign promise to provide protections for Bristol Bay," said Ellen Montgomery, director of our national public lands campaign. "Around the world, we are losing the equivalent of a football field worth of nature every minute. With this decision, thankfully, the headwaters of Bristol Bay won't be added to that tally."

Over the last two decades, Americans have submitted more than 4 million public comments opposing the Pebble Mine. This EPA decision is a long-awaited win for the environment.

Get more updates on our work online at <https://environmentvirginia.org>.

Staff



Minnesota now joins 10 other states with commitments to 100% clean or renewable electricity—an idea gaining momentum thanks in part to our advocacy and the support of people like you.

"When we set a goal of 10 states committed to 100% back in 2018, we intended that our early victory in California would ripple out to other states ... and it did, as our later campaigns led to victories in Maine, New Mexico and beyond," said Johanna Neumann, senior director of our national 100% Renewable Energy campaign.

"This victory in Minnesota is a testament to a good idea whose time has come. Now we're setting our sights on getting five more states committed to 100% clean and renewable energy this year."

How to make your lawn and garden better for bees

Pesticides and habitat loss are damaging bee populations, but you can help protect them from the comfort of your home and garden with five easy actions:

1. Plant a variety of native species. Bees specialize in the pollen their respective native plants provide, ensuring they and their young have enough to survive.

2. Plant flowers that bloom at different times of the year so bees always have flowers to visit. Some of the best annuals and perennials to use include marigold and sunflower, and aster and coneflower,



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Page 1 story continued:

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A continued threat

Still, far too many other mature and old-growth forests are at risk of being chopped down. From North Carolina to Oregon, more than 20 projects to log mature and old-growth trees on federal lands are moving forward. If allowed, these logging projects would cut down nearly 370,000 acres of our most important allies in the climate crisis. Additionally, a recent study identified more than 50 million acres of federal mature and old-growth forests without protections from logging.

More than 95% of our nation's wood supply comes from non-federal lands, and much of this wood is from small-diameter logs. Yet the U.S. Forest Service is still driven to meet timber production benchmarks and is sacrificing some of our most valuable natural resources to do so.

Logging mature trees would only result in more carbon released to the atmosphere at

a time when reducing our greenhouse gas emissions is critical. In Green Mountain National Forest, Vermont, many trees slated for logging are just reaching maturity at 80 years old. In the decades to come, this forest could store two to four times as much carbon as it does now.

In April 2022, President Biden issued an executive order directing federal agencies to protect mature and old-growth forests. A few months later, environmental groups, including Environment Virginia and our national network, delivered 122,000 public comments urging the Department of the Interior and the Department of Agriculture to move quickly to establish durable protections for mature and old-growth forests on federal lands.

Together, we can preserve our country's wild places, protect the wildlife that depend on them, and help stave off the worst consequences of global warming—all by simply letting mature trees grow.

Our staff and supporters delivered public comments on the Roadless Rule campaign in 2000. In 2001, our national network helped win the original Roadless Rule. We gathered and delivered nearly 700,000 public comments—more than half of all comments submitted—from our members and supporters.



Staff

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A former canvass director and organizer with Impact, Elly now directs Environment Virginia's efforts to promote clean air, clean water and open spaces in Virginia. Elly lives in Richmond, Virginia, where she enjoys gardening, photography, hiking and rollerblading with her dog.



Environment Virginia and The Public Interest Network are celebrating 50 years of action for a change.

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Your 2023 Summer Report

Our mission:

We all want clean air, clean water and open spaces. But it takes independent research and tough-minded advocacy to win concrete results for our environment, especially when powerful interests stand in the way of environmental progress.

That's the idea behind Environment Virginia, Inc., a project of Environment America, Inc. We focus on protecting Virginia's air, water and open spaces. We speak out and take action at the local, state and national levels to improve the quality of our environment and our lives.

The label tells you 'widely recyclable.' Is it true?

We all know the three Rs: reduce, reuse, recycle. For the sake of our environment, we should reduce the amount of plastic we use and be able to reuse and recycle the rest. But until our recycling systems can handle all types of plastic, we need accurate labels that clearly indicate what is truly widely recyclable to avoid unnecessary and unintended waste.

The United States produced 8 million tons of polypropylene in 2018 alone. Polypropyl-

ene is a plastic used to make containers and packaging—including yogurt cups and ketchup bottles—that's labeled with the number 5.

Even though it's widely used, it's not widely recyclable. According to the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) most recently available data, only 2.7% of polypropylene plastic packaging is ever recycled.

Despite that, a wide set of products made from polypropylene are now newly considered eligible for a "widely recyclable" label—and the How2Recycle program behind this "widely recyclable" label was founded by plastics producers such as ExxonMobil.

More than 17,000 members and supporters of Environment Virginia and our national network submitted comments to the EPA urging it to take the lead on recycling labels rather than letting the plastics industry call the shots.

Widely used polypropylene plastic is not 'widely recyclable' despite a new label created by the plastics industry saying so.



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