To log or let grow: The fate of our oldest forests hangs in the balance

By Ellen Montgomery, director of our national public lands campaigns

Just because a forest is on federal land doesn’t mean it is protected from logging. In fact, logging and selling of wood is built into the missions of two federal agencies, the U.S. Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management (BLM). That means logging is a persistent threat to many forests and trees that should be protected.

Some old forests are being logged right now. The Forest Service and BLM have approved numerous logging projects across hundreds of thousands of acres that target mature and old-growth trees, which store vast amounts of carbon and provide havens for a diverse array of wild plants and animals.

But thanks to hundreds of thousands of people who are speaking up for the trees—including Environment California members like you—we’ve urged the Biden administration to establish protections for these mature and old-growth trees and forests.

Progress on safeguards

In December, the U.S. Forest Service proposed the first nationwide plan to improve safeguards for old-growth forests. The proposal came after more than 500,000 comments submitted last summer urged swift and durable action to protect mature and old-growth forests.

The draft proposal sets ambitious goals for managing and expanding old growth in national forests, but contains major gaps. Notably, it carves out the Tongass National Forest—our largest old growth national forest—from protection. The proposal also leaves open the option to sell old-growth trees to timber mills that have been logged as part of ecological projects. And it does not offer protections for mature trees and forests, which if not logged, will eventually become old-growth. Our national forests, especially in the eastern United States, have little old-growth remaining.

During a public comment period that closed in early February, thousands of supporters like you asked for stronger provisions that eliminate commercial logging of old-growth trees.

Continued on page 3
FedEx should absolutely, positively ‘go solar’

When you drop off an overnight package with FedEx, wouldn’t you feel better if the energy used to deliver that package to its destination came from clean, renewable solar power?

On Jan. 11, our research partner Environment America Research & Policy Center delivered 11,500 petition signatures to FedEx world headquarters, urging the shipping leader to put solar panels on its warehouses and parking lots by 2035.

FedEx owns and operates more than 5,000 facilities with at least 122 million square feet of rooftop space. Researchers at Environment America Research & Policy Center determined that if FedEx maximized the solar potential of its roofs, the company’s rooftop solar arrays could provide 61% of the electricity it purchased in 2021.

According to the report “Solar on Warehouses,” if all of America’s warehouse roofs had solar panels, they could produce enough energy to power more than 19 million average homes.

“We absolutely, positively need to generate more of our energy from clean, renewable sources,” said Johanna Neumann, senior director of the Campaign for 100% Renewable Energy at Environment America Research & Policy Center. “FedEx can help America deliver on the promise of a cleaner, greener future.”

A bright idea: Cleaner lighting for California

California phased out the sale of screw or bayonet base compact fluorescent lamps as of Jan. 1, 2024, due to their energy waste and harmful health effects. This ban is a step towards energy efficiency and protecting Californians’ health.

Fluorescent lamps contain mercury, which is a potent neurotoxin that harms our nervous, digestive and immune systems.

“Phasing out fluorescent lighting will reduce exposure to toxic mercury and slash energy waste,” said Laura Deehan, state director of Environment California.

This wild desert near Joshua Tree deserves protection

The Chuckwalla Bench in California’s desert, southeast of Joshua Tree, is home to a variety of sensitive wildlife species, such as the desert rosy boa snake and desert tortoise. These endangered species are under threat of extinction from habitat loss.

That’s why we’re uniting with tribes and a coalition of local groups calling on President Biden to designate the Chuckwalla National Monument, which would permanently protect about 660,000 acres of public lands and create a protected wildlife corridor that connects habitats from Joshua Tree National Park all the way to the Kofa National Wildlife Refuge across the Arizona border.

“We live in the country that created the world’s first national parks,” said Laura Deehan, state director of Environment California. “It’s time to lean into our nation’s long legacy of conservation and protect the special natural places that we love, both for our own enjoyment and for the sake of the amazing animals that inhabit them.”

Join the movement by writing a message to President Biden asking him to designate the Chuckwalla Bench as a national monument in order to protect this sensitive environment from destructive development.

Get more updates on our work online at https://environmentcalifornia.org.
Tens of thousands of people and more than 170 organizations called on the U.S. Forest Service to strengthen its proposal to conserve old growth trees and forests on federal land.

**Standing together for the trees**

We’ve urged Congress to oppose the Manchin-Barrasso bill, which calls for deliberately chopping down our mature forests as a way to “improve forest health”—an obviously terrible and short-sighted idea.

Once our mature forests are gone, they’ll take decades to grow back. That’s more than 80 years of an intricate ecosystem destroyed in the blink of an eye. That’s decades we don’t have to keep huge amounts of climate-warming carbon from being released into the atmosphere.

We need our forests to stay standing for generations to come, but the Manchin-Barrasso bill threatens to level towering giants and destroy many of our nation’s mature trees. Thankfully, supporters and members of Environment California and our national network took more than 32,000 actions opposing this bill.

**All of our old-growth and mature forests deserve protection**

Seventy-six percent of the forests managed by the U.S. Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management don’t have strong protections from logging.

We can’t afford to cut down our oldest forests. They shelter wildlife and they shelter us from the worst impacts of climate change by absorbing carbon from our atmosphere.

Thanks to your support, we’re working to save our forests by raising the voices of forest defenders everywhere and urging the Biden administration to enact the strongest protections possible to keep them off the chopping block.

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**With your support, we’ll keep advocating for the strongest protections possible for our old-growth and mature forests.**
Let’s protect more of California’s ocean

On Feb. 14, Environment California staff met with the Fish and Game Commission to talk about California’s marine protected areas, and it was a make-or-break moment for our campaign.

Commissioners, state officials, environmental advocates and students convened to discuss 20 proposals to strengthen or weaken California’s Marine Protected Area network. Petitioners and other stakeholders had just one minute to make their case for acceptance or rejection.

After everyone had their say, a majority of the commission agreed that thorough vetting of proposals to protect the ocean is important and referred all of the proposals to the California Department of Fish and Wildlife for an in-depth review. The commissioners will revisit the proposals at their July meeting.

Our mission this summer is to build enough public support and make a strong enough case to convince Gov. Gavin Newsom, as well as his administration and the Fish and Game Commission, that California’s sea otters and other wildlife deserve more safe places in our ocean. The need for action is pressing, and delay is not an option.

Rachel Lucine (center), Environment California’s ocean conservation campaign associate, and coalition partners at a press event about the expansion of Marine Protected Areas, held at Natural Bridges State Beach.