

September 19, 2024  
US Department of Agriculture  
1400 Independence Ave SW  
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Secretary Vilsack:

We write to you to convey our strong support for the USDA Forest Service (USFS) to amend land management plans across the National Forest System to create a consistent approach to conserve existing old-growth forests and recruit future old-growth. We fully support the goals of protecting old-growth for the climate mitigation, species conservation, social, and cultural benefits it provides and increasing the amount of old-growth across the National Forest System (NFS). However, important changes to the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) are necessary to ensure that the final National Old Growth Amendment (NOGA) is able to deliver the management shifts that are needed on the ground and live up to the goals set forth by President Biden's Executive Order (EO) 14072 on [Strengthening the Nation's Forests, Communities, and Local Economies](#). In summary, the changes we request are as follows:

- The NOGA must end the logging of old-growth trees except in rare cases when required for public safety
- The NOGA must establish clear and enforceable guardrails for management that protect the limited remaining old-growth forest on the NFS from mismanagement
- The NOGA must begin to lay groundwork for a sizable portion of mature forests to be able to develop into old-growth.

One of the simplest and most cost-effective approaches to climate change mitigation and adaptation is to conserve our oldest forests as nature-based climate solutions. Mature and old-growth trees play an outsized role in carbon sequestration and storage. Moreover, they provide a host of related benefits, including world-class outdoor recreation opportunities - which supports a thriving outdoor industry in many of our districts, critical habitat for iconic and endangered species, hold deep cultural significance for many tribes, and they are connected to vital watersheds that fully half of Americans depend on for their drinking water.

Old-growth forests are also an important element in USDA's Wildfire Crisis Strategy. Older, ecologically intact forests are often more resilient to wildfire than forests with unnaturally high fuel loads comprised of younger trees resulting from a history of fire suppression. This nationwide forest plan amendment will help implement the Wildfire Crisis Strategy by way of conserving and restoring ecologically intact forests and making them more resilient to wildfire.

We see the NOGA as an opportunity to make real strides to reorient management to increase distribution and abundance of old-growth forest across the National Forest System (NFS). The final policy must advance the vision set forth by President Biden's EO 14072 to meaningfully conserve mature and old-growth forest on federal lands. At the most fundamental level, it is important that the final NOGA must end all but truly necessary logging of old-growth trees in order to be effective. The NOGA must allow the agency to effectively address threats posed by wildfire while establishing clear and enforceable guardrails for management that protect the limited remaining old-growth forest on the NFS from

mismanagement, and begin to lay groundwork for a sizable portion of mature forests to be able to develop into old-growth.

We strongly support USFS' timeline to adopt a final NOGA by January 2025. A strong public process will help inform the content of the NOGA, and support its durability well into the future. Meaningful consultation with tribes throughout the design and implementation of the NOGA is essential. We also want to ensure that our constituents' voices are heard on this important issue. Half a million people across the country engaged in a related comment period on old-growth forests last summer, and overwhelmingly supported conservation of forests.

USDA has an opportunity to secure one of the most popular and significant conservation measures in decades. Old-growth forests are of paramount importance, regardless of the ecosystem type or the legislative district where they are located. We urge you to strengthen the proposed NOGA before it is finalized to ensure that older forests are adequately conserved and that this policy is well-suited to implement the Wildfire Crisis Strategy and promote ecologically intact forests.

Sincerely,

Oregon Senator Jeff Golden  
(OR-3)

Alaska Senator Elvi Gray-Jackson  
(AK-G)

Alaska Representative Andy Josephson  
(AK-13)

Arizona Senator Juan Mendez  
(AZ-8)

California Assemblymember Steve Bennett  
(CA-38)

Colorado Representative Cathy Kipp  
(CO-52)

Colorado Representative Manny Rutinel  
(CO-32)

Colorado Representative Emily Sirota  
(CO-9)

Colorado Representative Brianna Titone  
(CO-27)

Colorado Representative Elizabeth Velasco  
(CO-57)

Colorado Senator Faith Winter  
(CO-25)

Connecticut Representative Kevin Ryan  
(CT-139)

Delaware Senator Stephanie Hansen  
(DE-11)

Florida Representative Anna Eskamani

Mississippi Senator Hillman Frazier  
(MS-27)

Montana Senator Mary Ann Dunwell  
(MT-42)

North Carolina Representative Mary Belk  
(NC-88)

North Carolina Representative Pricey Harrison  
(NC-61)

North Carolina Senator Julie Mayfield  
(NC-49)

North Carolina Representative Renee Price  
(NC-50)

New Hampshire Representative Jessica LaMontagne  
(NH-Strafford 17)

New Jersey Assembly Member Clinton Calabrese  
(NJ-36)

New Mexico Representative Joanne Ferrary  
(NM-37)

New Mexico Representative Tara Lujan  
(NM-48)

New Mexico Representative Andrea Romero  
(NM-46)

New Mexico Senator Antoinette Sedillo Lopez  
(NM-16)

New Mexico Senator Mimi Stewart

(FL-42)

Georgia Representative Marvin Lim  
(GA-98)

Georgia Senator Sheikh Rahman  
(GA-5)

Georgia Representative Kim Schofield  
(GA-63)

Georgia Representative Mary Frances Williams  
(GA-37)

Hawaii Representative Lisa Marten  
(HI-51)

Hawaii Representative Amy Perruso  
(HI-46)

Illinois Representative Kelly Cassidy  
(IL-14)

Illinois Senator Laura Fine  
(IL-9)

Illinois Representative Stephanie Kifowit  
(IL-84)

Indiana Representative Carolyn Jackson  
(IN-1)

Indiana Representative Matt Pierce  
(IN-61)

Indiana Senator Shellie Yoder  
(IN-40)

Kentucky Representative Adrielle Camuel  
(KY-93)

Massachusetts Representative Angelo Puppolo, Jr.  
(MA-12th Hampden)

Maryland Delegate Lorig Charkoudian  
(MD-20)

Maryland Delegate Michele Guyton  
(MD-42B)

Maryland Senator Benjamin Kramer  
(MD-19)

Maryland Senator Karen Lewis Young  
(MD-3)

Maryland Delegate Ashanti Martinez  
(MD-22)

Maryland Delegate Sheila Ruth  
(MD-44B)

Maine Senator Ben Chipman

(NM-17)

New Mexico Representative Elizabeth Thomson  
(NM-24)

Nevada Assembly Member Howard Watts  
(NV-15)

New York Assembly Member Jo Anne Simon  
(NY-52)

Ohio Representative Daniel Troy  
(OH-23)

Oklahoma Senator Mary Boren  
(OK-16)

Oregon Senator Michael Dembrow  
(OR-23)

Oregon Representative Zach Hudson  
(OR-49)

Oregon Representative Pam Marsh  
(OR-5)

Pennsylvania Representative Danielle Friel Otten  
(PA-155)

Pennsylvania Representative Joseph Hohenstein  
(PA-177)

Pennsylvania Representative Chris Rabb  
(PA-200)

Puerto Rico Senator William Villafane Ramos  
(PR-At Large)

Rhode Island Representative Terri Cortvriend  
(RI-72)

Rhode Island Senator Linda Ujifusa  
(RI-11)

Texas Senator Molly Cook  
(TX-15)

Texas Representative Vikki Goodwin  
(TX-47)

Virginia Delegate Paul Krizek  
(VA-16)

Virgin Islands Senator Samuel Carrion  
(VI-St. Croix)

Vermont Representative Leonora Dodge  
(VT-40)

Vermont Representative Troy Headrick  
(VT-32)

Vermont Representative Monique Priestley

(ME-28)

Maine Representative Poppy Arford  
(ME-101)

Maine Representative Janice Dodge  
(ME-39)

Maine Senator Nicole Grohoski  
(ME-7)

Maine Representative Laurie Osher  
(ME-25)

Maine Representative Sophia Warren  
(ME-124)

Michigan Representative Abraham Aiyash  
(MI-9)

Michigan Senator Sue Shink  
(MI-14)

(VT-60)

Vermont Representative Larry Satcowitz  
(VT-63)

Washington Representative Roger Goodman  
(WA-45)

Washington Representative Gerry Pollet  
(WA-46)

Washington Representative Alicia Rule  
(WA-2)

Wisconsin Representative Supreme Moore  
Omokunde  
(WI-17)

Wisconsin Senator Kelda Roys  
(WI-26)