



## USDA Forest Service Announces Plan to Amend all Forest Land Management Plans to Protect Old Growth Trees

**Consistent with direction from President Biden in Executive Order 14072 to conserve and restore old and mature forests, the U.S. Department of Agriculture announced a proposal to amend all 128 forest land management plans to conserve and steward old-growth forest conditions on national forests and grasslands nationwide.**

Healthy, climate-resilient old-growth forests store large amounts of carbon, increase biodiversity, reduce wildfire risks, enable subsistence and cultural uses, provide outdoor recreational opportunities and promote sustainable local economic development. Land management plans provide direction for how national forests and grasslands are managed for their many uses, including conservation. The proposed amendment will use the best available science, including Indigenous Knowledge, to provide consistent direction related to old-growth forest conditions across national forests and grasslands.

“Old-growth forests are a vital part of our ecosystems and a special cultural resource. This proposed nationwide forest plan amendment – the first in the agency’s history – is an important step in conserving these national treasures,” said Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack. “Climate change is presenting new threats like historic droughts and catastrophic wildfire. This clear direction will help our old-growth forests thrive across our shared landscape.”

“Our forests absorb carbon dioxide equivalent to more

than 10% of our nation’s annual greenhouse gas emissions,” said White House Council on Environmental Quality Chair Brenda Mallory. “Under President Biden’s leadership, our Administration is acting to conserve and restore old-growth forests so nature can continue to be a key climate solution.”

In June 2022, Secretary Vilsack followed through on President Biden’s Executive Order to conserve and restore old and mature forests and directed the USDA Forest Service to take action to address the impacts of climate change, restore forests and support forest resilience.

These actions include defining and conducting the first-ever nationwide inventory of old-growth and mature forests across national forests and grasslands. Launched on Earth Day 2023, this initial inventory report shows that the Forest Service manages nearly 25 million acres of old growth and more than 68 million acres of mature forests on national forests and grasslands. The proposal USDA is putting forward today relates only to lands managed by USDA Forest Service.

USDA has also released the Climate Risk Viewer, a tool to assess climate risks and vulnerabilities on national forests and grasslands. Additional actions to implement the direction from the Executive Order and the Secretary’s memo are forthcoming, including the finalization of a threat analysis on mature and old-growth forests and a proposed new national policy for monitoring the health of national forests and grasslands. The Forest Service will

continue to advance strategies and engage critical partners to build resilience and ensure future actions are responsive to the significant climate stressors that forests face.

The consistent management direction contained in the proposed nationwide forest plan amendment would direct place-based strategies for old-growth forest conservation and management, developed in partnership with Tribal communities and in collaboration with local stakeholders. These strategies will be adaptive and factor in the unique opportunities and challenges of a particular area, which will allow for more flexibility in responding to rapid changes in wildfire behavior, drought, insects and disease. The amendment would prohibit vegetation management within old-growth forest conditions when the primary purpose is to grow, tend, harvest, or regenerate trees for economic reasons.

Today's announcement builds on this foundational work and other significant actions to conserve old-growth and mature forests, such as USDA's restoration of roadless protections across nearly 9.4 million acres of the Tongass National Forest in Southeast Alaska.

The proposed national plan amendment was also informed by public comments on the Forest Service's Advanced Notice for Proposed Rule Making. The proposed plan amendment would also complement other related efforts across the Forest Service, including the Wildfire Crisis Strategy, Reforestation Strategy (PDF, 7 MB), and other strategic guidance documents. In Fiscal Year 2023, the Forest Service met and exceeded key milestones in addressing the wildfire crisis, restoring national forests and supporting rural communities. These benchmarks included treating 4.3 million acres of national forest system lands to reduce wildfire risk and 1.9 million acres of national forest land with prescribed fire – both were agency records and were enabled through strong partnerships with Tribes, state and local governments, conservation groups, industry and other important stakeholders.

Scoping on this proposal was initiated today as a Notice of Intent to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement in the Federal Register. The Environmental Impact Statement will evaluate the effects of a national land management plan amendment.

During the amendment process, proposed management actions in old-growth forests will be governed by an interim policy, outlined in more detail in a letter from the deputy chief of the National Forest System to regional foresters.

**Public comments can be submitted via webform at [www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=65356](http://www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=65356).**

**Hard copy letters may be submitted to:**

**Director, Ecosystem Management Coordination,  
201 14th Street SW, Mailstop 1108,  
Washington, DC 20250-1124.**

**Comments are most valuable to the agency if received by February 2, 2024.** 

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