

PRESS RELEASE

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For immediate release

Central Oregon LandWatch joins coalition to deliver more than 122,000 comments calling for protecting older forests and trees from logging

Bend, OR – Environmental groups, including Central Oregon LandWatch, delivered more than 122,000 public comments urging the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and the U.S. Department of the Interior (DOI) to protect mature and old-growth forests and trees on federal public lands from logging as a cornerstone of U.S. climate policy.

The public comment period was in response to President Biden's [executive order](#) that celebrated public forests as “some of the most biodiverse parts of our planet and play(ing) an irreplaceable role in reaching net-zero greenhouse gas emissions.” Today's comment deadline was for defining mature and old-growth forests.

Environmental groups say that mature forests and trees should be defined as 80 years and older to protect against the ongoing logging that undermines Pres. Biden's directive to retain and enhance carbon storage and conserve biodiversity. By 80 years of age, trees have accumulated decades of stored carbon and provide significant biodiversity benefits. The groups are calling for a federal rule that would designate stands and trees older than 80 years as off limits to logging with carefully tailored exceptions for non-commercial purposes, such as activities that support Tribal cultures or appropriate measures to protect structures from fire.

“As we face increasingly difficult challenges related to the climate crisis, one of the best things we can do is employ natural climate solutions, like protecting large trees,” said Jeremy Austin, Wild Lands and Water Program Manager at Central Oregon LandWatch.

While the public comment period was underway this summer, the [Climate Forests](#) coalition published [a report](#) detailing federal logging proposals targeting nearly a quarter of a million acres of mature and old-growth forests and trees across nine states, from California to Vermont. The report called on the Biden administration to enact a permanent administrative rule to protect these critically vital forests and trees, which would align with its pledge to protect federal forests as well as live up to its climate commitments.

Mature and old-growth forests store and sequester a vast amount of carbon, making them an essential resource for achieving our nation's climate commitments. They also offer other crucial ecosystem values, including wildlife habitat for vulnerable species, watershed function to provide water for communities across the country, and unmatched outdoor recreation experiences for the public.





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“Protecting large and old-growth trees has been at the core of LandWatch’s work since the organization began nearly forty years ago. Today, as we are confronted with the threats of a changing climate and a biodiversity crisis, we need strong policies at the national level that will leave our biggest trees standing,” says Ben Gordon, Executive Director of Central Oregon LandWatch.

As the harm from climate change intensifies, including extreme weather, drought and severe wildfires, groups are urging federal agencies to deploy effective strategies to mitigate and adapt to these impacts. Larger, older trees are generally more resistant to wildfires. Preserving mature and old-growth forests and trees is a meaningful, cost-effective measure the Biden administration can take immediately to help mitigate climate change. Federal forests sequester 35 million metric tons of carbon annually, a number that could rise steadily with new conservation measures to let these older trees continue to grow.

In addition to the public comments from grassroots supporters, more than 100 climate and conservation organizations [submitted a letter](#) calling for a strong, durable administrative rule to safeguard mature and old-growth forests from logging.

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