January 13, 2021

RE: Trump Administration Rollback of Protections for Old Growth in the Pacific Northwest.

Dear USDA Transition Team,

On behalf of our 33 groups and millions of members across America, we are writing to request the Biden administration stop the amendment to a rule known as the Eastside Screens which protects large trees and old growth in national forests of Eastern Oregon and Washington.

The Trump administration is pursuing its anti-participation, anti-science agenda by fast-tracking a rule change that would allow logging of carbon-rich trees across more than 9 million acres based on the false premise that it won’t have significant environmental impacts. We ask that the Biden administration stop this effort immediately, and tell the US Forest Service that any management changes that affect old forests have to prioritize carbon storage and biodiversity, and if they affect National Forests on anything approaching this scale, they must have the benefit of a full and public Environmental Impact Statement process.

This proposal has been opposed by dozens of conservation organizations, over one hundred independent scientists, and a number of notable people including retired Deputy Chief of the USFS Jim Furnish. We know that not only is a much more robust public process needed, but so are stronger protections for wildlife and the climate. Tribes have also raised concerns independently.

- **Old Growth Logging Undermines Climate Goals** - New science shows large trees in these landscapes play a disproportionately large role in storing carbon. Large trees also tend to be resilient to climate-driven disturbance like fire. Over 100 scientists have said this amendment will worsen the climate crisis.

- **The Public Process Has Been Novel, Rushed, and Unfair** - During the pandemic, the Trump administration has rushed this process over the objections of conservationists, independent scientists, tribes, and others with a novel process that included skipping scoping entirely. This appears to be the result of political pressure from the highest levels.

- **Old Growth Logging Threatens Wildlife and Biodiversity** - The Screens were intended to protect old-growth dependent wildlife. This proposal removes and weakens important protections for wildlife with very limited analysis, and no species-specific analysis.

- **This Process is Undermining Public Trust** - This process has damaged the credibility of the USFS and forest collaboratives. The Screens provided a framework within which great progress was made. Weakening protections for large trees and old growth will undo decades of effort to find common ground.

- **The USFS Failed to Consider Alternatives with Broad Support** - The Screens were adopted as a placeholder until more comprehensive ecosystem protections could be put into place. Many groups are open to addressing the Screens in a comprehensive manner guided by science where all stakeholders have meaningful input. The current proposal simply makes it easier to log big and old trees and makes it more difficult to find common ground in the future.

In recent months we have seen proposals on the ground that clearly demonstrate this amendment would result in controversial, destructive, and widespread logging of large and old trees across the region. That is why every place-based conservation group working in Eastern Oregon is a signatory to this letter.

Thank you for your attention to this matter. It’s hard to overstate the consequential nature of this proposal on the diverse forests in Eastern Oregon or the damage it would do to public trust in the USFS. We look forward to working with the new administration to avoid controversy and conflict, or - worse yet - irreversible damage to our public lands and the fight against the climate crisis. The current ill-considered effort to amend the Screens must be stopped and reversed.
Sincerely,

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