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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

February 15, 2022

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The missing link in Biden's climate agenda: Letting older trees grow

Environmental organizations call for a new national forest policy that protects old-growth and mature forests

Washington -- Today, a coalition of more than 70 groups launched a new campaign called the [Climate Forests Campaign](#), calling on the Biden administration to take executive action to protect mature trees and forests on federal lands, which are critical in the fight against climate change. This comes just a year after President Joe Biden signed an executive order, [Tackling the Climate Crisis at Home and Abroad](#), which set out a path to achieve net-zero emissions, economy-wide, by 2050 and to work with partners internationally to put the world on a sustainable climate pathway.

Members of the coalition include Center for Biological Diversity, Earthjustice, Environment America, Natural Resources Defense Council, Oregon Wild, Standing Trees, Sierra Club, Southern Environmental Law Center, Alaska Wilderness League, and Wild Heritage.

This month marks the 117th anniversary of the US Forest Service. For more than a century, the agency has focused much of its resources on logging and timber sales. The campaign is calling on the Biden administration to kick off a new era of climate and forest policy that values trees and forests as key pieces of the climate solution.

Forests — particularly older forests — store vast amounts of carbon and continue absorbing carbon as they age. Logging trees in these areas releases most of that carbon back into the atmosphere. Even under the best-case scenario, newly planted forests would not re-absorb this carbon for decades or centuries — timescales irrelevant to avoiding the worst impacts of climate change. Older trees and forests are also naturally more fire resistant. And they help limit the impacts of climate change by slowing soil erosion and moderating temperatures.

Carbon-absorbing older forests are also the best habitat for thousands of species of wildlife, including spotted owls, red-cockaded woodpeckers, and pine martens.

The last comprehensive federal policy to protect national forests, the Roadless Rule, was enacted in 2001 under President Bill Clinton. The Rule was adopted to protect nearly 60 million acres of designated “roadless areas” from logging and roadbuilding, safeguarding significant stands of remaining old growth. Though these areas act as a critical carbon sink, most older trees on federal land lie outside of roadless areas. Scientists and environmental groups say we must get all our public forests into the climate fight and do it now.

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Alaska Wilderness League stands with, serves and supports the many people and organizations that believe in a sustainable future for Alaska. We honor and respect the cultures of Alaska Natives whose way of life remains deeply connected to the state's land, waters and wildlife. We believe that Alaska's long-term economic future and subsistence traditions are inexorably tied to the health and sound stewardship of its natural resources, which support hunting, fishing, tourism, and unrivaled outdoor experiences that are central to Alaskans' quality of life.



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