

Green coalition urges federal protection for older forests

By Marc Heller

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A coalition of more than 70 environmental groups today called on the Biden administration to impose tougher restrictions on logging old-growth trees on federal lands.

The groups, including the Center for Biological Diversity, the Sierra Club and the Natural Resources Defense Council, launched an effort called the Climate Forests Campaign and urged President Biden to protect forests through executive action.

"It's completely unacceptable that federal land managers lack strong policies to protect old trees and forests, given all we know about how critical they are to our climate and biodiversity," said Randi Spivak, public lands program director at the Center for Biological Diversity, in a news release.

The organizations cited the climate benefits of older trees, in particular their ability to absorb carbon. Newly planted trees take decades to achieve the same capacity, they said.

The Biden administration has sent mixed signals on forest protection, reversing the Trump administration's moves to expand areas for logging in Alaska's Tongass National Forest, for instance, but also promoting wood products including an expansion of tall wood building construction.

The administration's "Build Back Better" agenda also envisions more forest restoration, although that legislation is stuck in Congress.

On a [website](#) for the campaign, the groups said: "We are calling on the Biden Administration to enact a strong, lasting rule that protects mature trees and forest stands from logging across federal lands as a cornerstone of US climate policy. The older parts of our nation's forests are climate and biodiversity champions."

They added, "If the Administration is going to lead in solving the climate and biodiversity crises, it must protect these carbon critical climate forests and set an example for the world."

Timber interests say logging supports the economy and can make forests less prone to big wildfires, although environmental groups say that's debatable.

Federal laws and regulations already keep loggers away from much of the forest system, said Bill Imbergamo, the executive director of the Federal Forest Resource Coalition, which represents timber companies operating in national forests.

Half of the 193 million acres in national forests is already off limits to logging because it's in designated wilderness areas or in places covered by roadless-area protections, Imbergamo said.

Overstocked forests are at increased risk of wildfire that releases carbon into the atmosphere, he said.

"Reducing management on the small portion of our national forests still open to management is the wrong move at the wrong time, both for our climate and our economy," Imbergamo said.