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Cosponsor Legislation to Prevent Forest Service from Finalizing National Old-Growth Amendment Plan

**Introduced by Vice Chair Doug LaMalfa (CA-01), Chairman Newhouse
(WA-04), and Vice Chair Tom Tiffany (WI-07)**

Background

The U.S. Department of Agriculture [initiated a scoping period](#) for a proposed amendment to all 128 plans across the National Forest System in December 2023.

The comment period for this scoping period closed on February 2, 2024; the Forest Service evaluated comments from the scoping and drafted an environmental impact statement (EIS) highlighting a preferred alternative, which was published in the Federal Register on June 21, 2024, with an accompanying 90-day public comment period.

The proposed amendment continues the objectives of the Biden Administration's misguided [Executive Order 14072](#), which will alter forest land management plans related to old-growth forests and grasslands across the country, restricting timber production on roughly 32 million acres of federal lands. A final EIS and record of decision for the amendment to all 128 National Forest system plans is expected at the end of 2024/beginning of 2025.

What Is Old-Growth Forest?

The [Mature and Old-Growth Forests: Definition, Identification, and Initial Inventory on Lands Managed by the Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management](#) technical report (FS-1215a) defines the old-growth narrative framework as:

Old-growth forests are dynamic systems distinguished by old trees and related structural attributes. Old-growth encompasses the later stages of stand development that typically differ from earlier stages in a variety of characteristics, which may include tree size, accumulations of large dead woody material, number of canopy layers, species composition, and ecosystem function (USDA Forest Service 1989).

In addition to their ecological attributes, old-growth forests are distinguished by their ecosystem services and social, cultural, and economic values. Old-growth forests have place-based meanings tied to cultural identity and heritage; local economies and ways of life; traditional and subsistence uses; aesthetic, spiritual, and recreational experiences; and Tribal and Indigenous histories, cultures, and practices. Dialogue with stakeholders and Tribal Nations and integration of local and Indigenous Knowledge with evolving scientific understanding are critical in identifying and stewarding old-growth forests. (p. 5)



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Issues with the Proposal

- The plan would amend 122 of 128 National Forest System Plans with a single amendment.
- This top-down approach ignores the fact that each National Forest is inherently different and needs tailored management plans.
- Of the 122 Plans that are amended, **95** are “likely to experience notable change” in management.
- Timber production would be **prohibited** in old-growth forests under the preferred alternative in the draft environmental impact statement (DEIS).
- The total amount of old-growth forests as inventoried by the Forest Service is 24.7 million acres – meaning timber production would be prohibited on 17 percent of USFS land.
- The Forest Service’s [introductory threat analysis](#) found that wildfire, insects, and disease pose the most significant threats to older forests and the agency’s most recent analysis, [released this month](#), indicates that old growth and mature forest loss was greater in areas restricted from timber harvest, including Congressionally-designated Wilderness, inventoried roadless areas, and national monuments, compared to areas where timber harvest is permitted.
 - This shows the agency’s own data contradicts their proposed plan.
- Forest Service data consistently finds that the nation has abundant old growth forests. In the West, the agency’s June 2024 analysis found that the proportion of forests aged 100 years and older is projected to increase, with relatively large increases in the 150-plus year age class under the current management paradigm, without the proposed amendment.