GEORGIA FORESTWATCH
PRESERVE PROTECT RESTORE GAFW.ORG

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GAFW Demands the Protection of Mature & Old-Growth Forests

GAFW recently signed an open letter to **Secretary Haaland** and **Secretary Vilsack**.

"On behalf of our members and supporters, the undersigned organizations thank you for requesting public input on how the Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management should advance critical conservation goals on federal forest lands. To meet your administration's goals for tackling the climate crisis and the biodiversity crisis and to fulfill the goals of President Biden's **Executive Order 14072**, it is imperative that both of your agencies protect mature and old-growth forests and trees through a substantive, nationwide regulation.

As both the Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management have identified, older forests and trees are crucial for addressing the climate crisis. **Older trees** and **stands** store and accumulate the vast majority of the above-ground carbon in a forest, and logging older forests and trees grossly **undercuts these benefits**. Nationally, **carbon losses from clearcuts and other logging** are **up to 5 times higher** than emissions from fire and other natural forest disturbances combined.

Your agencies have indicated an interest in prioritizing climate resilience. **Forests and trees that are allowed to grow old** enhance climate resilience by being **core reservoirs of carbon, biodiversity, and watershed integrity**. These forests are often well-established ecosystems that are relatively **resistant and resilient to changing conditions**. They provide climate refugia even as conditions around them change. Big trees are generally fire-resistant, with thick bark and raised crowns, and even when dead, have comparatively more moisture than smaller snags. And they provide these values throughout and well beyond their long lives. **Protecting these climate-critical forests and trees from logging** to ensure the long-term retention of these values is essential to advancing climate resilience.

Our older forests are also **critical for addressing the biodiversity crisis**. The **complex structure older forests and trees** develop provides **vital and unique habitats for birds up above**, critters **down below**, and everything in between. These forests often have shady canopies, providing habitat for species that need cool conditions. And even the **dead trees continue to offer snags and coarse woody debris**, which are ideal habitats for many species. In addition, **intact forested watersheds produce very high-quality water** vital for the forest's aquatic life and the communities that depend on it downstream.

Our organizations urge you to end ecologically harmful logging of mature and old-growth forests and trees on federal land. While there are certainly other threats to our older forests, the threat of logging is fully under your control. It can be quickly acted on without undercutting your ability to address other threats to communities and older forests.

And the logging on federal lands is clear and present, as the Advance Notice of Proposed Rulemaking acknowledges. More than 370,000 acres of mature and old growth are on the chopping block, from Vermont to Oregon. Our groups have identified 22 different logging projects, both planned and underway, that will cut mature and old-growth trees. For example, the Forest Service **is considering a project** that would log nearly 12,000 acres in Vermont's Green Mountain National Forest, 92% of which is classified as mature or old. In

Wisconsin, a proposed **project** in the Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest would log 12,000 acres of forest rich in mature stands. And in Oregon, the **Western Oregon BLM plans** to cut or "treat" more than 13,000 acres, of which 3,000 are mature and old-growth. The project will clearcut mature and old-growth forests that border many communities and residences west of Eugene. Logging will degrade or remove **habitat** for spotted owls, marbled murrelet, red tree voles, and coho salmon.

We ask you to act swiftly to protect mature forests and trees for their current natural values so they can grow to old growth and continue their work to help mitigate the climate crisis, contribute to healthy watersheds, and provide ecosystem resilience. Protection in the form of a rule must durably safeguard these values, be national in scope, and be simple to apply at the field level. And the agencies must meaningfully engage with Tribal Nations as they pursue these protections. These forests are worth more standing."

Forest Conservation Critical in Addressing the Climate Crisis

In addition to the above letter organized by partner group **Climate Forests**, GAFW also partnered with organizations regionally and nationally to respond to the **USFS's Advance Notice of Proposed Rulemaking** requesting public comment on how the agency should protect, conserve, and manage the national forests and grasslands for

climate resilience. These comments make a case for the USFS to issue a rule protecting mature and old-growth trees (MOG) and forests from logging. This is a generational opportunity to realign the agency's practices with the realities of a changing climate and the legacies of past inappropriate management.

With the **summer climate breaking records daily**, the USFS must radically update its thinking about what forestry means in a changing climate. All project-level vegetation management decisions should contribute to ecological integrity restoration (or maintenance) and increase carbon sequestration. Protecting our forests from logging is a paramount way the USFS can help ensure that we as a Nation are not leaving significant means of mitigating the climate change and biodiversity crises untapped, nor missing a critical chance to lead internationally on vitally important measures that other countries can and must adopt themselves.

Logging releases more greenhouse gas pollution than wildfire, both on a per-acre basis and nationally; for example, **U.S. Geological Survey data** from 2005-2014 found logging on Federal lands in the conterminous United States emitted 43 million metric tons of CO2 equivalent per year (MMT CO2 eq./year) compared to 21 MMT CO2 eq./year from fire. With a few exceptions (remnant plantations, for example), **GAFW calls on the USFS to impose a moratorium on commercial logging on our USFS lands**. Federal forests are one of the most effective, immediately available natural climate solutions. Until the full scope and solution to the climate crises are studied and understood, the USFS should halt projects that are baking the planet.

Federal forests play an indispensable role in any realistic pathway to achieving net-zero emissions and avoiding the worst effects of climate change—effects that would undermine all the ecological, recreational, and economic values derived from those forests. The USFS must prioritize stable carbon storage, ecological restoration, and biodiversity protection above all else to achieve the greatest good for public landowners in the long term.

Read our submissions **here** and **here**.

Debunking Forest-Fueled Climate Myths

Katherine Egland is the Program Director and Co-founder of the **Education, Economics, Environmental, Climate and Health Organization** (EEECHO), based in Gulfport, Mississippi. She chairs the **Environmental and Climate Justice Committee** for the NAACP. She has had a long and storied career addressing climate change issues from a civil rights, social justice, and equity perspective.

Ms. Egland is offering a presentation entitled "Debunking Forest-Fueled Climate Myths," covering the impacts of the wood pellet and biomass industries in the Southeast and their impact on communities of color.

Primarily centered in rural southeastern communities, using wood pellets for energy has significant and growing environmental impacts. In recent years the wood pellet export industry has exploded in the South, impacting Southern forests and the global climate.

A **2015 analysis** found that the net lifecycle emissions of heat-trapping carbon dioxide from burning wood pellets are higher than those from coal, oil, and natural gas. The production of wood pellets also negatively impacts **biodiversity and local forest carbon stocks**. Much of the fast-growing demand for wood pellets comes from overseas, where European countries have heavily subsidized wood pellet burning for power generation where they **incorrectly define burning pelletized wood as "carbon neutral."** Georgia's Forestry Commission also incorrectly states that biomass production and pelletizing **"give off no harmful greenhouse gases."**

There are three opportunities to join - 7/31, 8/21, & 9/18/23. **Register here**.

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Upcoming GAFW Outings

Thursday, July 27 - **GAFW Book Club Meeting**, Zoom (*Wild Spectacle* by Janisse Ray)

Friday, August 11 - **Museum of the Cherokee Indian**, Cherokee, NC.

Thursday, August 30 - **GAFW Book Club Meeting**, Zoom (*The Changing Blue Ridge Mountains* by Brent Martin)

Thursday, September 28- **GAFW Book Club Meeting**, Zoom (*Deliverance*, by James Dickey)

Saturday, October 14 - **Save the Date!** GAFW Annual Retreat at Red Top Mountain.

Friday, October 20 - Lula Lake Land Trust - Details will be posted soon.

Saturday, October 21 - **The Second Wurst Festival Ever**, Fannin Brewing Company, Blue Ridge, GA (Tickets on sale soon)

Thursday, October 26 - **GAFW Book Club Meeting**, Zoom (*Haints on Black Mountain* by Ann Hite)

Thursday, November 30 - **GAFW Book Club Meeting**, Zoom (*Literary Field Guide to Southern Appalachia,* Edited by Rose McLarney, Laura-Gray Street, and L. L. Gaddy)

Thursday, December 28 - GAFW Book Club Meeting, Zoom (*The Lost Book of Eleanor Dare* by Kimberly Brock)

GAFW Outings on Meetup

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Thank You

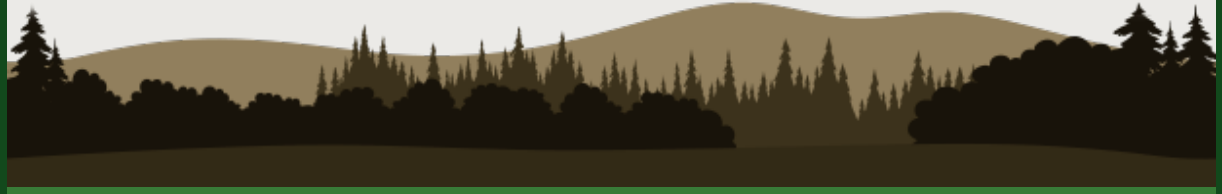
Georgia ForestWatch is the only nonprofit organization with a mission solely dedicated to ensuring the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forests remain healthy and available for future generations, and we can only pursue our mission with the support of the community.

Please support our mission by ensuring your **membership is up to date** and providing **additional support** as you are able.

On behalf of our entire national forests in our beautiful state, we thank you for your support.

Our Mission

Our mission is to preserve and protect our national forests.



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