

To: The Honorable Gina McCarthy, White House National Climate Advisor  
The Honorable John Kerry, United States Special Presidential Envoy for Climate

Cc: The Honorable Tom Vilsack, United States Secretary of Agriculture  
The Honorable Deb Haaland, United States Secretary of the Interior  
The Honorable Robert Bonnie, USDA Deputy Chief of Staff for Policy and Senior Advisor for Climate  
The Honorable Ali Zaidi, White House Deputy National Climate Advisor

Re: The Path to Glasgow Must Start in the Forest

Date: April 13th, 2021

Dear Gina McCarthy and John Kerry,

It is critically important that the United States, under President Biden, resume its role as an international leader in addressing the climate and biodiversity crises. This November, the U.S. delegation will once again enter the world stage at the 2021 United Nations Climate Change Conference in Glasgow, Scotland. Other countries will look to us to demonstrate leadership after four years of environmental and climate setbacks. Protecting forest carbon sinks is essential to the Paris Agreement and will be a priority for leaders from around the world — providing the largest, most cost effective, natural climate solution available. There will rightly be a focus on halting deforestation in the Amazon rainforest and other tropical regions. But closer to home, it will be equally essential to demonstrate U.S. climate ambition and global leadership by henceforth protecting our own remaining mature and old-growth forests on federal lands, especially the carbon-rich, temperate rainforests of the Pacific Northwest and the Tongass National Forest, starting with an immediate moratorium until a permanent rule can be adopted.

These ecosystems store even more carbon per acre than tropical rainforests.<sup>1</sup> Protecting our temperate forests in the Western U.S. from logging would store the equivalent of 8 years of

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<sup>1</sup> Law B.E., Hudiburg T.W., Berner L.T., et. al. 2018. Land use strategies to mitigate climate change in carbon dense temperate forests. Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences. <https://www.pnas.org/content/115/14/3663> and Keith H., Mackey B.G., Lindenmayer D.B., 2009. Re-evaluation of forest biomass carbon stocks and lessons from the world's most carbon-dense forests. Proc Natl Acad Sci USA 106:11635–11640. [https://www.pnas.org/content/106/28/11635?ijkey=86373bc1bd5ad2e138cf51d21a9ea48495d1cbd0&keytype2=tf\\_i](https://www.pnas.org/content/106/28/11635?ijkey=86373bc1bd5ad2e138cf51d21a9ea48495d1cbd0&keytype2=tf_i) psecsha and Krankina O.N., DellaSala D.A., Leonard J., Yatskov M. 2014. High-biomass forests of the Pacific Northwest: who manages them and how much is protected? Environmental Management. 54(1):112-21. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/24894007/>

regional fossil fuel emissions,<sup>2</sup> and the Tongass National Forest alone contains 8 percent of the nation's total forest carbon stores.<sup>3</sup>

The landscape of the Pacific Northwest and Alaska is defined by forests — they are a deeply ingrained piece of our culture, economy, health, and wellbeing. For indigenous communities, temperate rainforests also support a cultural heritage stretching back thousands of years. But if mature and old growth forests continue to be logged, these communities may suffer as salmon, shellfish, and other culturally significant species decline as a result of changes in streamflow and water temperature.<sup>4</sup>

These and other largely intact older forests are also a key solution for confronting the planet's related extinction crisis<sup>5</sup> by buffering species from more extreme climate impacts and securing myriad co-benefits, such as clean water. Establishing permanent protections for these essential carbon reservoirs and climate sanctuaries is directly in line with the Biden administration's goal to protect 30 percent of lands and waters by 2030.

To maximize our country's impact in Glasgow, prioritizing the mitigation contribution of public forests must be a central component of our own climate strategy. Establishing permanent protections for temperate rainforests in the Pacific Northwest and Alaska, along with mature federal forests and trees nationwide, will be one of the most cost-effective and essential near-term climate solutions the United States can employ.

Sincerely,

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<sup>2</sup> Buotte P.C., Law B.E., Ripple W.J., et al. 2019. Carbon sequestration and biodiversity co-benefits of preserving forests in the western United States. *Ecological Applications*.

<https://esajournals.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1002/eap.2039>

<sup>3</sup> Leighty, W., Hamburg, S., and Caouette, J. 2006. Effects of Management on Carbon Sequestration in Forest Biomass in Southeast Alaska. *Ecosystems*. 9. 1051-1065.

[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/225169208\\_Effects\\_of\\_Management\\_on\\_Carbon\\_Sequestration\\_in\\_Forest\\_Biomass\\_in\\_Southeast\\_Alaska](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/225169208_Effects_of_Management_on_Carbon_Sequestration_in_Forest_Biomass_in_Southeast_Alaska)

<sup>4</sup> USDA 2016. Climate Change and Indigenous Peoples: A Synthesis of Current Impacts and Experiences/ [https://www.fs.fed.us/pnw/pubs/pnw\\_gtr944.pdf](https://www.fs.fed.us/pnw/pubs/pnw_gtr944.pdf) Also see (Jenni et al. 2014, Montag et al. 2014)

<sup>5</sup> Watson, J., Evans, T., Venter, O., Williams, B. et al. 2018. The exceptional value of intact forest ecosystems. *Nature Ecology & Evolution*. 2.

[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/323399911\\_The\\_exceptional\\_value\\_of\\_intact\\_forest\\_ecosystems](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/323399911_The_exceptional_value_of_intact_forest_ecosystems)

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