

Mature & Old Trees in Eastern Oregon Forests - 21 inch rule

Context: At a time when scientists and policymakers alike are advocating for the protection of mature and old trees, wildlife and water on our public lands, the Biden Administration has been saddled with a rule promulgated by a Trump appointee days before the end of his Presidency.

The rule eliminates the protection for mature and older trees on over 14,000 square miles of the Fremont Winema, Deschutes, Ochoco, Malheur, Umatilla, and Wallowa Whitman National Forests. This is 2/3 of the state of Oregon, and it is important to note these are not just dry pine forests. These lands have extensive moist mixed conifer forests that you might mistake for the coast range if you were led there blindfolded.

The forests with mature and larger trees have high levels of biodiversity, store more water, and have significant cultural importance to the Nez Perce tribe (Contacts: David Mildrexler, Angela Sondena)

Efforts to thin these landscapes to reduce fire risk are being questioned by top scientists and will result in more carbon loss than fire itself, degrade water and biodiversity. (Synthesis - Dr. Law, forthcoming)

Money Flowing In: Large sums of money are flowing to the Forest Service for forest management and the expectation is that there will be a ramp up in thinning for fire risk reduction consistent with the Wildfire Crisis Strategy. The agency is doing less public process and scientific review, and increasingly devolving control to collaborative groups dominated by industry representatives and local politicians.

Litigation on the Horizon: the Forest Service is already proposing and planning backcountry logging of large trees on a significant scale from the Fremont Winema (South Warner Project) to the Umatilla National Forest (Ellis Project) to the doorstep of the Eagle Cap Wilderness and in the Hells Canyon National Recreation Area (Morgan Nesbitt Project). The elimination of the protection for trees 21 inches diameter at breast height was to allow for larger Grand firs to be cut to pay for the “restoration”.

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Wildlife

3 new policies added **2 proposed**

Status of Trump's rollbacks: **7 overturned**

12 targeted **11 not yet targeted**

One of the hallmarks of former interior secretary David Bernhardt's legacy has been the narrowing of safeguards for endangered wildlife. The northern spotted owl, whose forest habitat is disappearing; the Pacific walrus, which faces shrinking sea ice; and the Bryde's whale, threatened by oil and gas drilling in the Gulf of Mexico, are likely to receive enhanced protections under Biden.

making critical habitat designations. [Read more »](#)

Scaling back sage grouse habitat protections

Trump sued

The Bureau of Land Management published a notice saying it would reconsider the Trump administration's management plans to withdraw sage grouse protections spanning 10 million acres to allow drilling. [Read more »](#)

Easing salmon and smelt protections

Trump sued

Relaxed environmental protections for salmon and smelt in California's Central Valley. [Read more »](#)

Changing Endangered Species Act consultations

Scaled back consultations under the Endangered Species Act. [Read more »](#)

Logging large Trees in eastern Oregon and Washington

Reversed a 25-year policy of barring the logging of trees with a diameter of 21 inches or more in national forests in eastern Oregon and Washington. [Read more »](#)

WHAT CAN 3 TREES DO?

LARGE TREES, OVER 21" IN DIAMETER, MAKE UP ONLY 3% OF OUR FORESTS.

STORE CARBON

42% of the carbon held in forests is stored in large trees.

FOSTER FIRE RESILIENCE

Large trees with thick, fire-resistant bark keep temperatures cooler and groundwater levels higher, preventing fire ignition and spread.

PROVIDE SHADE

Create microclimates—dense canopies keep forest floors cool. Without large trees, soil dries out and makes it hard for seedlings to grow.

MAKE US HAPPY

Large trees create natural spaces for enjoyment and actually reduce stress!

HOMES FOR ANIMALS

Large trees, snags, and hollows create protected habitat for a wide range of animals.

PROTECT WATER

Protect water—dense forests hold groundwater, provide shade that prevents evaporation, and improve nearby streamflows.

RESIST DROUGHT

Expansive root systems mean large trees reach deeper into the ground for water supplies, and can better survive drought.

PROTECT SOIL

Massive root systems hold soil, stabilize slopes, and prevent erosion. This, in turn, prevents flooding.

Based on a 2020 study of Washington and Oregon forests east of the Cascades, "Large Trees Dominate Carbon Storage in Forests East of the Cascade Crest in the United States Pacific Northwest," by Midreiter D.J., Berner L.T., Law B.E., Birdsey R.A. and Mooney W.P., Frontiers in Forests and Global Change 3:504274