

February 25, 2021

RE: Review Oregon Eastside Screens Decision under Climate Executive Order 13990

Mr. Bonnie and Mr. French,

We are writing to ask that [the Trump administration's recent amendment to the rule commonly known as the Eastside Screens](#) be reviewed under President Biden's [Climate Executive Order 13990](#) and, if found to have failed in process, substance, and/or its impact on climate, that it be withdrawn. The decision puts old growth and wildlife habitat at risk on millions of acres of public lands just as we begin to seriously address the climate and biodiversity crises.

The protections for large and old trees provided by the Screens were put in place by the Clinton administration in the mid-1990s as an emergency measure. The Screens were created with a promise that these protections would be augmented by more comprehensive and durable ecosystem protections. The USFS never honored that promise and instead, last year, began a politically driven process to weaken the rule under the Trump administration.

It is undisputed that large and old trees are ecologically critical and there remains a regional shortage of them. The Forest Service's scientific analysis in this process was rushed, biased, and insufficient. No attention was given to the rule change's climate implications until the last minute. That analysis eventually revealed that increased logging of large trees will cause significant carbon emissions during the next several decades when GHG emissions have the greatest impact on our ability to address the climate crisis. This comes just as [new science shows](#) that the 3% of large trees to which the Screens apply store over 40% of the carbon in the forest.

The process of amending the Screens was novel, rushed, and unfair to the public. The agency failed to provide an opportunity for public scoping and did not do the robust analysis required to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement. The final decision was made by a Trump appointee just two business days before President Biden was inaugurated, giving the public only a single opportunity for formal involvement. We believe the Forest Service also failed to fully consider impacts to tribal treaty rights. This proposal has generated tremendous controversy and puts at risk decades of work to create common ground, trust, and collaboration. That is one reason that former USFS [Deputy Chief Jim Furnish raised objections to this process](#).

The Purpose and Need of this rule change (such as fuel reduction) can be accomplished by using existing practices, and thinning the other 97% of smaller trees. That is why [over one hundred independent scientists called this effort misguided](#) and [developed a comprehensive report](#) addressing the significant science the agency ignored and brushed aside.

So it was with great relief to the [dozens of conservation, wildlife, indigenous, public health, and climate groups](#) who have [repeatedly raised concerns](#) about this process that we learned of President Biden's Executive Order. We believe that a review of this decision is clearly needed, and, when completed, it will become evident that the decision to reduce protections for large and old trees on over 9 million acres of public land failed on several fronts and should therefore be rescinded.

Doing so will avoid additional controversy, as well as bad outcomes for our forests, wildlife, communities, and climate. It will also help rebuild trust and foster common ground which are sorely needed to allow a return to successful and credible collaboration in Eastern Oregon.

We stand ready to work with this administration, the USFS, and other stakeholders in a process to address legitimate concerns about how to restore our beloved National Forests of central and eastern Oregon.

We request a response to this letter providing clarity on when and how this review will proceed by March 27, 2021.

Very Sincerely,



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Executive Director
Oregon Wild



Darilyn Parry Brown
Executive Director
Greater Hells Canyon Council



Ben Gordon
Executive Director
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Mathieu Federspiel

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Blue Mountain Biodiversity Project



Chris Krupp
Public Lands Guardian
WildEarth Guardians



Joanne Richter
Co-Leader
Central Oregon Bitterbrush Broads
Great Old Broads for Wilderness

CC:
Senator Wyden
Senator Merkley