

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

August 1, 2022

Roger Worthington
Worthy Garden Club
495 NE Bellevue Drive
Bend, OR 97701

Dear Roger,

We are writing in response to your letter dated July 28 seeking information regarding our positions on protecting old growth trees and forests in Eastern and Central Oregon. We appreciate Worthy Garden Club's dedication to education and action on critical environmental issues, including preserving and restoring old growth forests. We are grateful for the opportunity to express our shared desire to see these landscapes protected with the participants of your symposium.

We have consistently fought to ensure management on public lands protects old growth trees and forests in order to maintain and enhance the numerous benefits provided by those important resources.

Earlier this year, we joined other members of the Oregon delegation in calling on the federal land management agencies to protect and restore mature and old growth forests. We were pleased to see the Biden administration respond with an executive order to protect old growth and mature forests. As a definition and framework for inventorying and protecting old growth and mature forests on federally-managed lands is developed under this executive order, we will be in close communication with the administration to ensure that public input from Worthy Garden Club and other interested Oregonians is carefully considered and definitive action is taken.

In your letter of July 28 you ask some key questions. Our answers are below.

Do you agree that protecting mature and old-growth trees during a climate emergency is critical for absorbing and storing atmospheric carbon, filtering water, providing habitat for wildlife, reducing the risk of wildfires, maintaining soil stability, and cooling our planet?

We strongly agreed with the need to protect mature and old growth trees and forests long before we knew there was a climate emergency. Now that the climate emergency presents itself more and more obviously each year, with increased drought, fires and heat waves in the summer and increased ice storms during the winters, it has become even clearer that mature and old growth forests and trees provide numerous ecological benefits critical to mitigating the effects of climate change, including cooling their environs, carbon storage and watershed health including habitat and soil stability.

During a climate emergency, do you support reviving regulations that protect large mature trees greater than 21" DBH in Eastern and Central Oregon on public lands?

Reviving the 21" DBH standard might help protect large trees, some of which are in old growth forests, but to repeal the amendment and revive the rule based on political pressures rather than solid scientific analysis will not help the forests in the long run. The repeal of the 21" diameter standard, applicable

only to forests east of the Cascades, that was adopted during the Trump administration was actually developed during the Obama administration. The 21” diameter standard was clear and easily understood by the public. The move away from this definable standard has produced some confusion and concern over how the USFS will implement the more subjective standards with which it was replaced. This, in turn, is making needed forest health projects more controversial.

Do you support the decision by the USFS to open more than 11,000 square miles of public lands in Eastern and Central Oregon to logging?

We do not support any decision to remove clear protections for old-growth trees and forests across Eastern and Central Oregon but we are not aware of a project or decision that opens 11,000 acres in this region to logging. There is no shortage of active management to improve forest health and reduce fire risk that can and should be done across the landscape which does not require removing larger, more fire-resilient trees. Implementing forest health treatments and reducing wildfire risk is most effective and efficient when projects focus on the least controversial areas that are currently contributing to the greatest risks.

Do you support an effort to hold public hearings on the issue of how to best implement durable protections for the remaining mature and old-growth ecosystems on public lands in Central and Eastern Oregon?

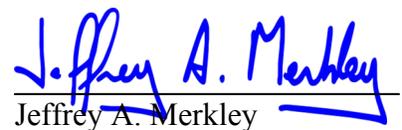
We believe that the public should always have a voice. We fully support public involvement in decisions affecting the management of public lands. These opportunities are especially critical when the resource is one that cannot easily be replaced once lost, as is the case with mature and old growth ecosystems.

Our strong belief in the value of public participation and transparency is why we have upheld our commitments to holding open-to-all, public town hall meetings in every county each year. These meetings have only served to reinforce our belief that direct, public engagement is the best way to govern. To that end, we will always push for federal agencies to include the public in the development of the policies that affect the public interest.

Thank you again for providing the opportunity to share our views on the importance of protecting mature and old growth forests with you and your symposium attendees. We look forward to receiving the feedback from this event. Please do not hesitate to reach out if you would like to discuss these issues further.

Sincerely,


Ron Wyden
United States Senator


Jeffrey A. Merkley
United States Senator