

**THE SISKIYOU MOUNTAIN ADVOCATE**

# National forest policy, the Late Mungers Project, and Medford District BLM

BY LUKE RUEDIGER

A year ago, on Earth Day 2022, President Biden signed an executive order directing federal agencies to promote the protection of mature and old-growth forests on public lands as a natural climate solution. One year later, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and the US Forest Service (USFS) have released federal guidance that proposes to increase the protection of federal lands for the purpose of conservation and climate mitigation.

The proposed federal rulemaking would for the first time bring BLM into the modern era by putting conservation “on equal footing” with extractive uses like mining, grazing, logging, and oil drilling. The proposed rulemaking also promotes “protecting important natural, cultural, and scenic resources” and the protection of “intact, native landscapes.” Additionally, the BLM and USFS have proposed to manage for climate resilience throughout our federal lands.

To inform this new direction, the agencies also released an inventory and detailed definitions for mature and old-growth forests. The inventory identified over 32 million acres of old-growth forests nationwide (including Alaska), accounting for 18 percent of all forested BLM and USFS lands. It also identified 80 million acres of mature forests, constituting 45 percent of all public forest lands. These forests and the proposed federal rulemaking represent a massive conservation and climate

mitigation opportunity, yet the agency has failed to propose the necessary protections for these forests and to end old-forest logging on public lands.

Important for the habitat, clean water, and climate refugia that they provide, these forests are also important for the carbon stored in large living trees, snags, downed trees, and forest soils. For example, research in the dry forests of eastern Oregon shows that large-diameter trees (over 21 inches in diameter) constitute only three percent of the trees in these forests, but they store 42 percent of the total above-ground carbon. Additionally, the coastal forests and forests west of the Cascade Mountains right here in Oregon and northern California are among the most carbon-rich conifer forests in the world. Currently, forests pull about one-third of all human-caused emissions from the atmosphere, and if we allowed mature forests to grow, they could take up twice that amount. Protecting these forests is one of the most powerful climate mitigation strategies available, and its benefits can be fully realized by simply *not* logging these important public lands.

Currently, advocates across the country have identified over 370,000 acres of



*These large diameter trees are proposed for logging in the Late Mungers Timber Sale above Murphy, Oregon. Many in the Applegate Valley believe this timber sale should be canceled and the BLM should permanently protect our last mature and old-growth forests and trees.*

mature and old-growth forests proposed for logging by the BLM and USFS. This includes forests across the west and the midwest and the hardwood forests of the east. It also includes forests right here in the Applegate Valley and southwestern Oregon. In fact, in a series of reports released by the Forest Climate Campaign, 22 timber sales across the country have been identified as inconsistent with President Biden’s executive order on the protection of mature and old-growth forests, and the Medford District BLM had more timber sales on the list than any other land management agency.

Locally, the BLM is moving forward with the controversial IVM (Integrated Vegetation Management) Project and the subsequently proposed Late Mungers and

Penn Butte Timber Sales in the mountains between Williams, Murphy, and Selma. These projects propose logging nine million board feet of mature and old-growth forests and trees in the Mungers Butte Late Successional Reserve, an area specifically set aside to protect old forest habitats and connectivity for the northern spotted owl. The project would log trees up to 42 inches in diameter and would leave as little as 30 percent canopy cover. It would also implement “group selection logging,” a form of staggered clear-cut logging that removes whole groves of mature trees.

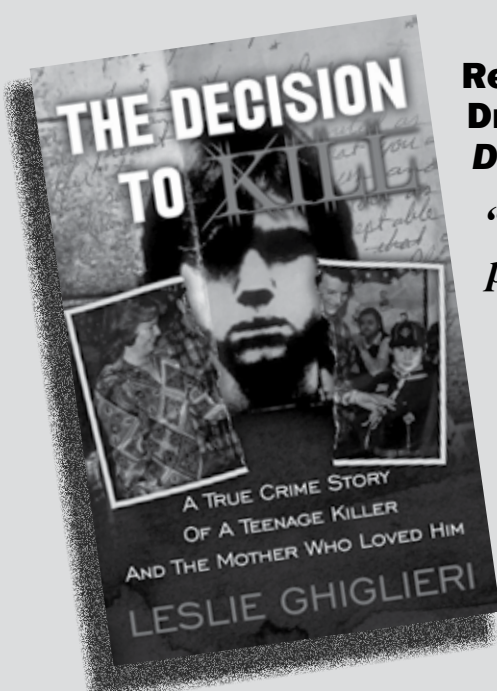
Residents and organizations throughout the Applegate Valley are asking our federal officials to cancel these timber sales and protect mature and old-growth forests nationwide. All too often, we propose protecting forests in faraway places like the Amazon or Congolese rainforests and the boreal forests of the far north as climate solutions. Yet we refuse to do our part right here in the Pacific Northwest, where some of the world’s most carbon-rich forests can be found.

We must protect the last mature and old-growth forests for the climate, for the water, for the wildlife, for the carbon stored in the trees, and for future generations. To protect these values, our global climate, and the health of our watersheds, the BLM must cancel the Late Mungers and Penn Butte Timber Sales. These and many other forests are simply worth more standing!

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