



NATIONAL CONGRESS OF AMERICAN INDIANS

**The National Congress of American Indians  
Resolution #SAC-22-012**

**TITLE: Request That the US Department of Agriculture and Department of the Interior to Urgently Initiate a Rulemaking Process to Protect the Remaining Mature and Old-Growth Forests and Trees on Ancestral Lands Managed by the US Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management**

**WHEREAS**, we, the members of the National Congress of American Indians of the United States, invoking the divine blessing of the Creator upon our efforts and purposes, in order to preserve for ourselves and our descendants the inherent sovereign rights of our Indian nations, rights secured under Indian treaties and agreements with the United States, and all other rights and benefits to which we are entitled under the laws and Constitution of the United States and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, to enlighten the public toward a better understanding of the Indian people, to preserve Indian cultural values, and otherwise promote the health, safety and welfare of the Indian people, do hereby establish and submit the following resolution; and

**WHEREAS**, the National Congress of American Indians (NCAI) was established in 1944 and is the oldest and largest national organization of American Indian and Alaska Native tribal governments; and

**WHEREAS**, mature and old-growth forests and trees store extraordinary amounts of carbon for long periods of time and continue to sequester carbon far into their lives, thus playing a critical role in fighting the climate crisis that threatens Tribal communities and their traditional ways of life across the country; and

**WHEREAS**, mature and old-growth forests and trees support high levels of biodiversity and thus help recover and ensure the continued flourishing of fish, wildlife, plants, and watersheds critical to the treaty rights, traditional and customary uses of lands that are central to Tribal Nations; and

**WHEREAS**, mature and old-growth forests and trees play a critical role in protecting and enriching watersheds that provide Tribal people and communities with clean water that has sustained Tribal Nations for time immemorial; and

**WHEREAS**, durable protections for mature and old-growth forests and trees and appropriate management strategies will secure soil and ecosystem health for future generations; and

**WHEREAS**, most mature and old-growth forests on the continent have been lost due to European and American colonization and settlement, but the ancestral lands currently managed by the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) and Bureau of Land Management (BLM) still contain important expanses of these forests; and

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**WHEREAS**, these remaining mature and old-growth forests and trees—and the natural values they contain—continue to be threatened by climate change, catastrophic wildfire, and forest management activities approved by USFS and BLM; and

**WHEREAS**, President Biden’s Executive Order 14072 rightly recognizes the importance of mature and old-growth forests to Tribes and in the fight against the climate crisis, and directs USFS and BLM to adopt policies to protect these forests from threats; and

**WHEREAS**, USFS and BLM have a duty to conduct government-to-government consultation directly with tribal nations and communities in meaningful engagement and inclusive land management processes; and

**WHEREAS**, Tribal peoples’ longstanding care of the mature and old-growth forests and trees on ancestral lands now managed by USFS and BLM have been in place for millennia, and the natural values of these forests have long been integral to Tribal Nations’ traditional and customary practices; and

**WHEREAS**, federal regulations can durably protect and enhance the natural values of these mature and old-growth forests, and the inherent right to acquire and use Tribal traditional and customary foods in such forests, comparable to protection of wildlands by the 2001 Roadless Rule.

**NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED**, that NCAI requests that the United States Department of Agriculture and the United States Department of the Interior urgently initiate a rule making process to conserve the remaining mature and old-growth forests and trees on ancestral lands managed by USFS and BLM from avoidable logging, subject to limited exceptions—such as exceptions to the extent necessary for fire risk reduction and ecological management (including pursuant to Tribal co-management and stewardship activities)—that prioritize retaining the trunks of felled large trees in the forest for their stored carbon and habitat values wherever possible; and

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, that NCAI requests that the Departments require USFS and BLM to develop additional management strategies and local planning processes, in partnership with Tribal Nations, to conserve forests on ancestral land management by USFS and BLM and grow younger forests into old-growth with site-appropriate species composition; and

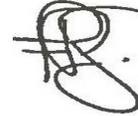
**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, that NCAI requests that the Departments prioritize the meaningful engagement and government-to-government consultation with Tribal Nations from across the country in such a rulemaking process and provide the support necessary to Tribal Nations for such participation; and

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, that any regulation that results from such a rulemaking process, not infringe on Tribal Treaty rights, shall enhance Tribal co-management or stewardship opportunities, respects traditional and customary uses, incorporates Indigenous Traditional Ecological Knowledge, and continues meaningful, supported collaboration with Tribes in an inclusive land management process integrated with Tribal traditional land and forest management practices; and

**BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED**, that this resolution shall be the policy of NCAI until it is withdrawn or modified by subsequent resolution.

**CERTIFICATION**

The foregoing resolution was adopted by the General Assembly at the 2022 Annual Conference of the National Congress of American Indians, held in Sacramento, CA, October 30-November 4, 2022, with a quorum present.



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Fawn Sharp, President

**ATTEST:**



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Stephen Roe Lewis, Recording Secretary