

A BEGINNING



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

2005 marks the 100th anniversary of the U.S. Forest Service, an event that will be met with celebration, pomp and circumstance within the agency. Reality, however, tells a far different story from the one that will be told by the Forest Service and its industry patrons. It is the story of an agency that long ago strayed from its original intent. It is the story of an agency that has been the victim of political manipulation and the influence of special interests such as the timber, oil, gas and mineral industries. The anniversary celebration will stand in stark contrast to the agency's legacy of on-the-ground mismanagement that has left the nation with only 15 percent of its biologically rich old-growth forests. In the lower 48 states, less than five percent remains. Indeed, 100 years after the establishment of the U.S. Forest Service, little of our once endless forest estate would be recognizable to those who first created the public lands system.¹

America's public forests, those that are owned by the American people, make up some of the most distinguishing landscapes that define the United States. The redwood giants of California, the Ponderosa pines of Arizona, the sugar maples of the Midwest and the spruce trees from Maine to Appalachia are American icons. However, most Americans mistakenly believe that their federal forests are protected from industrial activities such as logging, mining and drilling. Most Americans are also unaware that for decades their public forests have been systematically abused by a highly subsidized Forest Service, which wastes vast sums of taxpayer dollars on money-losing programs. The pace of this mismanagement has accelerated under the Bush administration to the detriment of our economy, clean air and water, climate stability, fish and wildlife habitat, recreational activities and public health.

Our remaining intact public forests serve society in many ways, and have far greater value intact than the timber that could be extracted from them. Our public forest lands are a peaceful refuge for physical and spiritual renewal. More than 60 million people depend on national forests for clean drinking water. Stands of old-growth forest reduce the

severity of forest fires. In fact, catastrophic forest fires in this country most commonly occur on logged and roaded lands, not in intact old-growth forests.² Intact forests also provide a huge number of jobs. Recreation on federal forests contributes more than \$111 billion to the economy, creating more than 2.9 million jobs each year.³

Despite the long list of economic, social and environmental benefits provided by intact forest land, what little remains continues to be fractured and significantly altered under the management of not just the Forest Service, but also the Bureau of Land Management (BLM). Unless far-reaching measures are taken, it is now questionable as to whether these remaining forests can sufficiently maintain ecological integrity, support the nation's biological diversity and provide long-term social and economic benefits for this and future generations.

To mitigate further degradation, this nation must allow for the protection and restoration of whole forest ecosystems to serve as a base for connected landscapes throughout North America. Determining where to start such a process has led to the development of numerous scientific studies that compare the physical makeup of forests with long histories of logging, mining, drilling and road-building to those that are relatively untouched. Other studies have evaluated forests by their concentrations of rare plant and animal species or have examined habitat and water quality.

Greenpeace, in cooperation with the Big Sky Conservation Institute (BSCI), has for the first time combined this data to create a map showing the "Keystone Forests" of the United States. Using the criteria of habitat fragmentation, the presence of rare species and ecosystem quality, Greenpeace and BSCI have identified the forests that represent the nation's last large areas of continuous forest that provide the healthiest habitat for the greatest number of species.

The keystone forest map emphasizes areas with the least habitat fragmentation because the breakup of habitat into small, isolated patches is considered to be a primary cause

of native species loss,⁴ particularly with regard to forest-dependent species.⁵ Most importantly, this map shows that these keystone forests are largely comprised of federal land-holdings, land owned by the American taxpayer. If protected from the mismanagement of the Forest Service and BLM, these regions can serve as the greatest storehouse of the nation's land-based biological diversity and as a stronghold of environmental services that benefit the greatest number of people.

In this report, Greenpeace and BSCI identify 11 keystone forests that deserve priority for protection. A section on each forest includes maps showing the characteristics and ownership status of each forest, a physical description, a list of threats to the forest and current efforts to save it.

This report also details the mismanagement of forests on public lands. A history of the Forest Service illustrates how political and special interest pressures have subverted the agency's original mission, sacrificing its charge to sustain the health and diversity of our national forests and overemphasizing their timber productivity. The Forest Service's failure to take into account the economic value of non-timber prod-

ucts and environmental services—or worse, its deliberate disregard for such worth—is a record of scandalous fiscal irresponsibility.

The final section of this report lists concrete steps that the United States can and must take to protect the remaining largest tracts of intact forest. The critical first step to protecting our national forests is a moratorium on large-scale commercial logging and other industrial activities on land managed by the Forest Service and BLM. Secondly, a significant portion of these lands should be transferred to agencies and designations with a proven track record of greater protection. “A User's Guide to Federal Land Protection” provides options for increasing forest protection within the existing federal structure.

As the U.S. government enters into its second century of public land management, this report serves as a reminder and a warning. While we must celebrate our noble cause to protect our nation's grandeur, majesty, splendor and bounty, we must not be blinded by it. We must learn from the past to ensure our future.



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