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Enviro group urges end to old-growth cuts at Grand Canyon

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An environmental group urged the Forest Service to stop a logging project on the Grand Canyon's North Rim that's cutting down centuries-old ponderosa pines.

In a letter to the Forest Service's regional forester for the Southwestern Region, the Center for Biological Diversity said the cutting of old-growth trees appears to go beyond the agency's earlier description of the effort, called the Jacob Ryan project.

The ongoing work at the Kaibab National Forest is eliminating habitat valuable for sequestering carbon and reducing wildfire risks, and another proposed project in the same area promises more of the same, the group said.

"The approach at Jacob Ryan embodies the failed, commercially driven management of the past, one that has increased fire risk, and that has been essentially abandoned on every other forest in the Southwest Region," [wrote](#) Todd Schulke, a senior staff member at the Center for Biological Diversity, to Regional Forester Sandra Watts.

A Forest Service spokeswoman said the agency is aware of the concerns and is committed to working together with "interested parties."

"We are optimistic that if we work together, we can find common ground on management approaches that assure the Kaibab National Forest is healthy and resilient for the enjoyment of current and future generations," agency spokesperson Babete Anderson told E&E News.

She said the Forest Service is coordinating with interested parties to discuss their concerns.

The dispute centers on a broad effort proposed and approved during the Obama administration, which included reviews under the National Environmental Policy Act. The Center for Biological Diversity had unsuccessfully sued the Forest Service over the Jacob Ryan project in 2012, citing risks to old forests and species such as the northern goshawk.

As the proposal proceeded, the Forest Service said it would focus on thinning smaller trees. The Jacob Ryan project involves 724 acres of "patch cuts," with about 100 acres of old-growth forest targeted for harvest.

"Our observations in the field suggest that the true impact of old tree logging is far greater than that disclosed in the project's NEPA documents," the Center for Biological Diversity told the agency.

"The Forest Service is cutting down some of the largest, oldest trees left in the American Southwest," Joe Trudeau, the center's Southwest conservation advocate, said in a news release. "These old, fire-resistant ponderosa pines are champions at absorbing greenhouse gas emissions. The last thing we need in a climate emergency is to whack these giants down."

The Kaibab National Forest totals 1.54 million acres, split into three ranger districts that aren't adjacent.