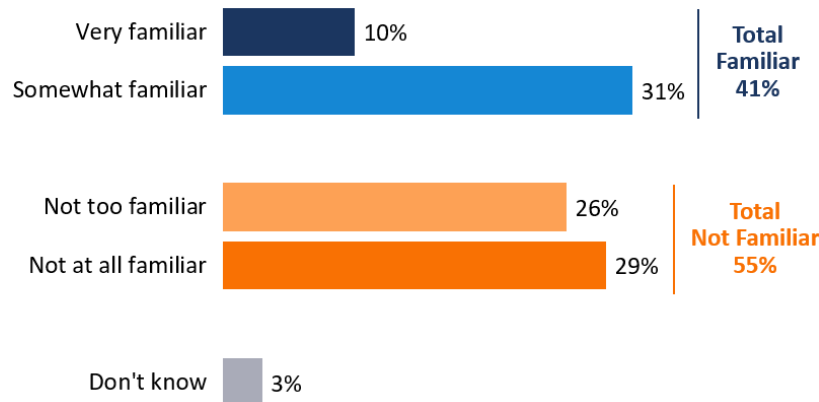| **TO**	Interested Parties
FROM	Dave Metz, Miranda Everitt, and Denny Han FM3 Research Lori Weigel New Bridge Strategy
RE:	American Voter Views of Old-Growth Forests
DATE	September 12, 2024

The bipartisan research team of New Bridge Strategy (R) and FM3 Research (D) has recently completed research with American voters to better understand their views of old-growth forests and policies related to their management.[i] The study shows that American voters value old-growth forests, particularly for their benefits to clean water, wildlife, and natural beauty -- and **they broadly agree that we should manage old-growth forest health with selective thinning to preserve these benefits.** Key findings include:

- **Most voters are unfamiliar with old-growth forests.** Fifty-five percent of voters say they are "not familiar" with old-growth forests given a brief description. Three in five (29%) are "not at all familiar."

Figure 1: Support for Conserving and Stewarding Old-Growth Forests
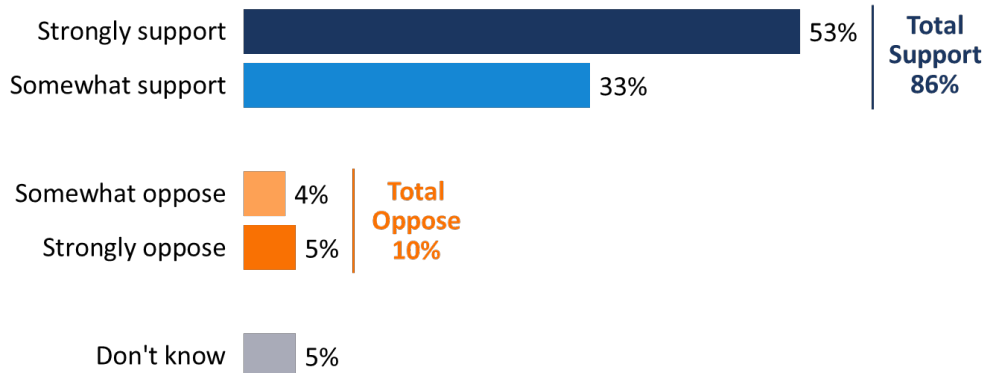
According to the US Forest Service, old-growth forests are distinguished by the presence of old trees and how those old trees impact the forest. 19% of forest land under management by the Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management is old-growth. Having heard this, how familiar would you say you are with old-growth forests?

Very familiar	10%	**Total Familiar 41%**
Somewhat familiar	31%	
Not too familiar	26%	**Total Not Familiar 55%**
Not at all familiar	29%	
Don't know	3%	

- **Despite this, voters broadly and strongly support plans to conserve and steward old-growth forests.** Figure 2 shows American voters' uncommonly broad (86%) support for aligning land management plans to preserve old-growth forest benefits while allowing forest management. In fact, more than half "strongly support" it (53%). This support is shared across every major demographic and geographic group, with 70% or more supporting it regardless of party, ideology, gender, age, and region of the country.

Figure 2: Support for Conserving and Stewarding Old-Growth Forests

The US Forest Service recently announced a proposal to align all its 128 land management plans, with a similar set of goals to conserve and steward old-growth forests in the National Forest system. The US Forest Service will develop local strategies to preserve old-growth forests' benefits for wildlife habitat, clean water, and clean air, while allowing forest management to prevent wildfire and support forest health. Does this sound like something you would support or oppose?

Strongly support	53%	**Total Support 86%**
Somewhat support	33%	
Somewhat oppose	4%	**Total Oppose 10%**
Strongly oppose	5%	
Don't know	5%	

- **As part of that proposal, voters strongly support thinning trees, using controlled burns, and partnering with Tribal leaders to manage old-growth forests.** Three in five strongly support thinning trees and using controlled burns, while 57% say the same of partnering with Tribal leaders. Restricting timber harvesting and adapting forests for climate change, while less popular, also have broad and intense support.

Figure 3: Support for Proposal Elements

I will read you a list of potential elements of this proposal dealing with management of old-growth forests on national public lands. Please tell me whether each one sounds like something you would support or oppose.

Proposed Element	Strongly Support	Total Support
Thinning trees in old-growth forests to promote forest health and reduce wildfire risk	60%	**87%**
Allowing trained fire teams to use controlled burns to remove growth in old-growth forests that could fuel wildfires, when and where it is safe to do so	59%	**87%**

Proposed Element	Strongly Support	Total Support
Enabling forest management partnerships with Tribal leaders	57%	**87%**
Managing old-growth forests to enhance their ability to withstand changing conditions	55%	**86%**
Enabling forest management partnerships with Tribal leaders, including controlled burns	53%	**85%**
Restricting commercial timber harvest in old-growth forests	53%	**73%**
Improving the capacity of existing and future old-growth forest conditions to adapt to the ongoing effects of climate change	51%	**72%**

- **By a two-to-one margin, they prefer selective thinning to protecting <u>all</u> trees in old-growth forests.** As shown in Figure 4 below, 61% of voters agree that we should allow selective thinning of forests on publicly owned land to keep forests healthy -- and just one-third (34%) prefer protecting all old-growth. The preference for selective thinning is shared by majorities across party and region of the country, with 67% of voters in the West preferring thinning.

Figure 4: Preference for Managing Old-Growth Forests

I am going to read you a pair of statements about old-growth forests. Please tell me which statement comes closer to your personal opinion, even if neither is exactly right.

Statement	% Chosen
We should allow selective thinning of old-growth forests on publicly owned land because it will help keep them healthy	61%
We should protect <u>all</u> old-growth forests and the benefits they provide by prohibiting <u>any</u> thinning of these forests on publicly owned land	34%
Don't know	10%

- **Underlying this desire to keep forests healthy is a keen sense of the benefits of old-growth forests.** Voters value old-growth forests for a range of benefits (Figure 5), including providing clean water (86% call that "extremely" or "very important), providing fish and wildlife habitat (86%), supporting diverse systems of plants and animals (85% -- a plain-language way of describing "biodiversity), and providing natural beauty and

connection to nature (78% each). Notably, "providing timber" is the least broadly valued benefit of old-growth forests (41%), and just over half value them for their economic benefits or as settings for hunters and anglers.

Figure 5: Benefits of Old-Growth Forests

I am going to read you a list of benefits that old-growth forests can provide. Please tell me how important each is to you: extremely important, very important, somewhat important, or not too important.

Benefits	% Extremely or Very Important
Providing clean water	86%
Providing fish and wildlife habitat	86%
Supporting a diverse system of plants and animals	85%
Providing natural beauty	78%
Providing connection to nature	78%
Providing settings for outdoor recreation like hiking and camping	70%
Providing unique naturally occurring substances that can be used as medicines	66%
Sustaining indigenous ways of life	65%
Storing the pollution that causes climate change	60%
Drawing tourism that supports rural economies	58%
Providing settings for hunting and fishing	53%
Providing timber	41%

- **Most voters think American forest conditions have declined in recent years**. More than two in five (42%) say that the overall condition of American forests has gotten worse in the last few years, while just 11% think conditions have improved.

- **American voters see wildfires, invasive species and forest pests as major threats.** Figure 6 shows the threats to old-growth forests that concern voters most. Notably, 90% see wildfires as a "major" or "minor threat" to these forests, with more than two-thirds (69%) expressing the highest level of concern. And while majorities named every threat listed as least a "minor threat," they are most intensely concerned about fire, drought, and growth and development.

Figure 6: Threats to Old-Growth Forest Health

I am going to read you a list of potential threats to old-growth forests. Please tell me whether you think each is a major threat, a minor threat, or not a threat to them.

Threat	Major Threat	Major or Minor Threat
Wildfires	69%	**90%**
Invasive species	51%	**87%**
Forest pests and diseases	46%	**85%**
Drought	55%	**84%**
Growth and development	57%	**83%**
Air pollution	46%	**82%**
Extreme heat	50%	**80%**
Logging	51%	**79%**
Impacts of outdoor recreation	19%	**76%**
Not enough environmental regulations and protections	50%	**72%**
Climate change	51%	**69%**
Too many environmental regulations and restrictions	34%	**58%**

- **Themes centered on protecting forests for future generations and as an escape from daily life resonate with voters.** At least half of voters say preserving old-growth forests for future generations, to use as an escape from daily life, and preventing wildfires are "very convincing" messages in support of active management.

Figure 7: Most Convincing Messaging Themes

Here is a series of statements from people who support this proposal. Please tell me if you find it very convincing, somewhat convincing, or not convincing.

Message	Very Convincing
(GENERATIONS) Some old-growth trees are hundreds or even thousands of years old. It is our duty to manage forest health now, so that future generations can experience this connection to the past.	53%
(ESCAPE) Old-growth forests give us opportunities to escape from day-to-day life into a place of incomparable natural beauty found in few other places on earth. By managing them to support forest health, we can preserve these iconic and peaceful places.	51%
(FIRE) By investing in properly managing old-growth forests, we can prevent catastrophic wildfires that threaten people, property, wildlife habitat, and air and water quality. Controlled burns, thinning, and other strategies can improve forest health and protect our communities.	50%
(ECONOMIC/RECREATION) Tourism and outdoor recreation are the backbone of many rural American economies — and old-growth forests provide places to camp, hike, fish and experience nature. By protecting these forests, we can protect local economies.	43%
(INDIGENOUS) Native American people rely on old-growth forests to sustain their cultural and spiritual practices. By managing the oldest trees and improving forest health in partnership with Tribal people, we can show respect for their way of life.	43%
(WATER) By restoring the health of our old-growth forests, we can protect drinking water at the source and reduce the cost of filtering and cleaning water for millions of people.	42%

- **Voters have broadly favorable views of the Forest Service.** 70% see the Forest Service favorably with 35% very favorable and 35% somewhat favorable and only 6% unfavorable.

- **Park rangers, Forest Service, and Tribal leaders are highly trusted messengers on the topic of old growth forests.** As shown in Figure 9, nine in ten voters trust park rangers while more than seven in ten trust the US Forest Service and tribal leaders. Conversely, more than two thirds (68%) view timber companies with suspicion.

Figure 9: Trusted Messengers

I will read a list of people and organizations that may take a position on issues relating to old-growth forests. Please tell me whether you would trust each person or organization's opinion on this issue a great deal, trust them somewhat, be somewhat suspicious, or be very suspicious.

Person or Group	Total Trust	Total Suspicious
Park rangers	89%	7%
The US Forest Service	73%	19%
Tribal leaders	72%	16%
The Associate of Fish and Wildlife Agencies	66%	19%
Conservation organizations	59%	26%
Foresters	51%	25%
The Bureau of Land Management	51%	35%
Family forest owners	46%	25%
Your neighbors	45%	34%
Timber companies	21%	68%

In sum, American voters value old-growth forests for a wide range of benefits they provide – but generally see forest health as in decline, particularly as they are threatened by wildfires. **Rather than protecting all old-growth forests on public land, they support selective thinning to improve forest health and protect the many benefits of old-growth forests,** including water quality, wildlife habitat, and places of natural beauty and connection.

i **Methodology:** From May 13-20, 2024, FM3 and NBS completed 836 online and live telephone interviews (on both landlines and cell phones) with likely November 2024 voters in the United States. The margin of sampling error for the study is +/-3.5% at the 95% confidence level; margins of error for population subgroups within the sample will be higher. Due to rounding, not all totals will sum to 100%.