



LOUISIANA WILDLIFE FEDERATION

The voice of Louisiana's wildlife and natural resources since 1940.

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Resolution No. 3, 2024

SUBJECT: Protecting, Researching, and Expanding Louisiana's Mature and Old-Growth Forests

WHEREAS, Louisiana's natural habitats are diverse and varied, with dozens of forest plant communities alone, many being adapted to natural regimes little changed for thousands of years, and all critical to wildlife and recreationists and important to our natural heritage (Louisiana Wildlife Action Plan 2015; Delcourt, Pre-settlement Vegetation of North Louisiana 1976); and

WHEREAS, the natural forests of the state were widely and permanently altered during the logging boom at the beginning of the 20th century, and the undisturbed and less-disturbed acres continually dwindle under agroforestry, urban sprawl, invasive species, flood-control projects, energy infrastructure, natural disasters, and climate change (Louisiana Wildlife Action Plan 2015; Grace, Martin, & Smith, Natural Community Surveys of Kisatchie National Forest 1991-1995); and

WHEREAS, early-seral and late-seral forests support the greatest diversity of specialist wildlife and plants, but young forest cover is stable while mature forestsⁱ, especially those with old-growth characteristics are dwindling and not being replaced by current forestry practices (U.S. Forest Service, Region 8 Old-Growth Definitions 1997; Owalt, Louisiana Forest Analysis Report, 2013; University of Vermont, Restoring Old-Growth Conditions; Board Pers. Obs.); and

WHEREAS, thousands of acres of public and private land have been classified as old-growthⁱⁱ in Louisiana (Davis, Old-Growth in the East 1993; Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries, Online Description of Soda Lake Wildlife Management Area; Grace, Martin, & Smith, Natural Community Surveys of Kisatchie National Forest 1991-1995; U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Bayou Cocodrie Conservation Plan), but the majority of these stands have received insubstantial protection and are still susceptible to salvage cutting, thinning, commercial harvests, gradual conversion to pine dominance, and other inimical practices (Board Pers Obs.); and

WHEREAS, the highest priority for preservation should be placed on stands which are relatively undisturbed and approximate pre-settlement conditions (e.g. Preservation of the State Arboretum at Chicot State Park), of which many are still undiscovered or undescribed on both public and private lands (U.S. Forest Service, Region 8 Old-Growth Definitions 1997; Davis, Old-Growth in the East 1993); and

WHEREAS, Federal Executive Order 14072 has forced the U.S. Forest Service to develop new, more universal definitions and management guidelines for mature and old-growth forests, sparking talks at the regional and local level on compliance with these goals, and their adoption in essence by other agencies; and

WHEREAS, the mature and old-growth forests are appreciated by outdoor recreationists, and a common sentiment among consumptive and non-consumptive users is one of awe and mysticism about old forests.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that Louisiana Wildlife Federation (LWF) urges the protection and restoration of mature and old-growth forests, following especially the regional definitions and local descriptions from prior inventories and focusing first on those sites identified in the prior inventories, to ensure the continued and expanding presence of old forests on the Louisiana landscape.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that LWF urges the focus of research and education efforts on mature and old-growth stands (especially closed-canopy systems) and areas protected from conventional forestry practices, to advance scientific knowledge and raise public awareness of the ecology and the tangible and intangible importance of wild spaces.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that LWF urges the staff of local, state, and federal agencies working within Louisiana, such as the Louisiana Department of Agriculture and Forestry, Louisiana Department of Culture, Recreation, and Tourism, the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and U.S. Forest Service as well as universities and colleges throughout the state to undertake inventories of their forest lands to identify, protect, and describe mature and old-growth forests in their holdings.

Adopted by the Louisiana Wildlife Federation in Convention Assembled on August 17, 2024 in Lafayette, Louisiana.

ⁱ Examples of old-growth structures and characteristics in Louisiana include an age of at least 120-250+ years since the last canopy replacement, decadent or ‘commercially overmature’ overstory trees, large and abundant coarse woody debris, large and abundant snags, tree specimens which are large for the species or the site conditions, a multilayered canopy and regeneration of overstory and understory species, stable populations of cavity dwelling wildlife, conservative and relictual plant taxa, few signs of human disturbance, etc.

ⁱⁱ Often referred to as: remnant/virgin/old-growth/commercially-overmature/late-successional/undisturbed/steady-state/primeval/all-age forests