



May 10, 2023

United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative,

Giant sequoia trees, an endangered species endemic to the Sierra Nevada range in California, are under threat. These majestic trees, larger than any other on earth and providing unique ecosystems where other plants and animals flourish, speak of the splendor of creation. Some living sequoias are more than three thousand years old.

As such, the value of sequoia trees transcends their remarkable ecological and even aesthetic significance (cf. *Laudato si'*, no. 84). Living giant sequoia trees are literal and symbolic witnesses to the history of America. Some trees standing today were alive when California's first peoples, Native Americans, dwelled in the Sierra Nevada range long before European contact. They also witnessed the arrival of Spanish missionaries and the first explorers to appear in the North American Pacific coast, all the way to early American settlers and the waves of migrants that compose California's diverse population today. These trees are a symbol of human memory and history, with its lights and shadows, so dear and important for forging the identity of a people and a nation (cf. *Fratelli tutti*, no. 13).

We have wounded creation through sins of omission and commission. The IPCC has recognized climate change as responsible for the increase of 'fire weather' globally. Fires in 2020 and 2021 have destroyed numerous giant sequoia groves; one fire alone decimated over ten thousand giant sequoias in 2020. Just last year the Washburn Fire and Oak Fire threatened sequoia groves in Yosemite National Park which were protected by firefighters battling to preserve our national heritage.

The Save Our Sequoias Act proposes a long-term investment and strategy to protect this patrimony of creation. We commend the Members of Congress who have sponsored this bill. After Pope Francis wrote his encyclical on ecology he followed up with [*Fratelli tutti: On fraternity and social friendship*](#), an encyclical calling for "a single human family... brothers and sisters all" to put forward a "better kind of politics" (no. 8, 154). As brothers and sisters, Republicans and Democrats, we must care, together, for our one common home. The Save Our Sequoias Act is a great example of the "better kind of politics" the Holy Father was advocating.

Sincerely,

Handwritten signature of Borys Gudziak in blue ink.

Most Reverend Borys Gudziak
Archbishop of Ukrainian Catholic Archeparchy
of Philadelphia
Chair, Committee on Domestic Justice and
Human Development
United States Conference of Catholic Bishops

Handwritten signature of Gerald E. Wilkerson in black ink.

Most Reverend Gerald Wilkerson
Auxiliary Bishop Emeritus of Los Angeles
Chair, Environmental Stewardship Committee
California Catholic Conference