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John Sinclair, Reviewing Officer
Attn: EPS Objections
Suite 800, USDA Forest Service, Eastern Region
626 East Wisconsin Avenue
Milwaukee, WI 53202

Dear Mr. Sinclair,

I have been involved with responding to scoping notices and draft versions of the Telephone Gap Integrated Resource Project (TGIRP) since the earliest public outreach dating back to March of 2023. My comments here concern the proposed action to allow the Vermont Huts Association (VHA) to construct a new recreational structure in the Diverse Backcountry Management Area allocation near South Pond.

This final version of the EA still has not addressed the very clear problem that is presented by the VHA's proposal to construct a hut that is prohibited by the current Forest Plan. Page 59 of the 2006 Green Mountain National Forest (GMNF) Forest Plan under Standards and Guidelines for Diverse Backcountry 6.2 states - "***Recreation Standard: S-1: Construction of new developed recreational facilities shall be restricted to those needed for resource protection***". Additionally, the final EA does not address that there is a specific need for a hut aside from the fact that the GMNF has received a Special Use Permit application requesting one be built in the South Pond area.

It appears that the forest had multiple options and decided on the most blatant and confounding scenario - violate regulations and policy and ignore the clear direction given in the current forest plan by illegally allowing the construction of this hut by the VHA.

There were earlier choices that could have been made by the Forest regarding this management area conflict. Before the parcel was acquired by the Forest Service, an existing structure (cabin) was burned by arson in January of 2018, so the land was

vacant when the agency took ownership in the fall of 2023. The GMNF knew in advance that the land in and around South Pond would be placed under the Diverse Backcountry Management Area when acquired. However, there was already scoping for this project at the onset of the TGIRP which included building a new hut *prior* to the acquisition of these lands. It was clear at that time that this would violate the 2006 Forest Plan. For some reason the forest did not place this parcel in a different Management Area where such construction could be allowed. In addition, the Forest chose not to amend the forest plan to allow this Diverse Backcountry Management Area allocation to have recreational structures placed throughout.

The Diverse Backcountry Management Area 6.2 allocation was created for the 2006 Forest Plan - which had extensive public involvement at the time. The decisions on specifically where this allocation fit on the landscape were also approved by the public for that final plan. Why has the current Forest leadership decided it can violate that approved plan without following agency policy by amending that Forest Plan?

Finally, it should be noted that in the Forest's response to my earlier comments, no argument was given that this new hut was being constructed for resource protection and therefore met this Standard. The Forest has never tried to explain why they feel this hut is necessary. Your response to my comments directed me to Section 3.10, pages 98 - 103 of the Preliminary EA which is disingenuous and nonsensical - as it provides no statements which address my issue.

It appears that the VHA submitted a Special Use Application for a hut, so the forest is going to allow it, even in violation of their guiding land allocation document, the 2006 Green Mountain National Forest Plan. The bottom line is the GMNF wouldn't turn a blind eye to violating timber related standards and guidelines as outlined in the forest plan, so why is it okay to do so when a special use permittee is the benefactor?

Respectfully,

/s/Kim M. Kinville

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