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USDA – Forest Service, Rochester Ranger District
c/o Christopher Mattrick
99 Ranger Road
Rochester, VT 05767

Christopher Mattrick – District Ranger,

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the proposed South Pond Hut Special Use Permit and Project-Specific Forest Plan Amendment within the Green Mountain National Forest (GMNF).

While I appreciate the opportunity to comment, I find it challenging to offer constructive and meaningful feedback in the absence of a forest-wide analysis for the remaining huts proposed on National Forest System (NFS) lands.

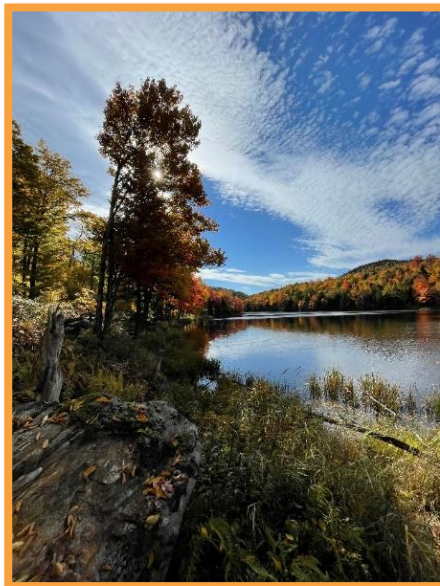
As you acknowledged during the June 24, 2023 public meeting at Blueberry Hill, the Forest Service has decided to discontinue analyzing hut proposals on an individual basis. This shift was presented as a means to improve transparency and to better assess the cumulative benefits and potential impacts of a hut system across the forest. Given that commitment, it seems premature to proceed with the South Pond Hut proposal in isolation.

Since the hut proposal was removed from the Telephone Gap Integrated Resource Project for clear Forest Plan violations, a specific Forest Plan amendment (waiver to the Diverse Backcountry MA Recreation Standard S-1) should not be a substitute for the comprehensive evaluation that a forest-wide approach would provide. Advancing a singular hut proposal without the broader context risks undermining the very transparent and holistic assessment goals that the Forest Service has committed to. This has the appearance of tossing the road map out the window and proceeding down the road without any navigational guidance.

I respectfully urge the Forest Service to pause the South Pond Hut proposal until the promised forest-wide analysis is completed and made available for public review. This would allow stakeholders to evaluate the proposal within the full scope of ecological, recreational, and community considerations, and ensure that decisions are made with a clear understanding of long-term implications.

Additionally, constructing the South Pond Hut would disrupt the pristine character of what makes the Diverse Backcountry MA unique, undermining the very sense of solitude that draws hikers, xc skiers and snowshoers to the area. Nestled in a quiet corner above Chittenden Reservoir and Leffert's Pond, South Pond offers a rare opportunity to experience nature in its untouched state – free from the noise, infrastructure, and crowds that often accompany built environments. Introducing a hut would not only alter the visual landscape but also increase foot traffic, mountain bike use, backcountry skiers and snowmobiles, diminishing the peaceful atmosphere and ecological integrity of the site. Preserving this area without development ensures that future visitors can continue to find quiet reflection, wildlife encounters, and a deeper connection to the natural world – values that are increasingly rare and worth protecting.

Thank you for your attention to this matter and for your continued stewardship of the Green Mountain National Forest.



South Pond

Respectfully,

/s/Kim M. Kinville

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