

August 29, 2025

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 (SUP) and Project-Specific Forest Plan Amendment within the Green Mountain National Forest (GMNF).

While I appreciate the chance to provide input, I find it difficult to offer meaningful feedback based solely on the scoping documents posted on the [project website](#). As I have raised with you previously, no meaningful public assessment of the project's scope can be made without access to the SUP application and supporting documentation submitted by the Vermont Huts Association (VHA). As of this writing, I still have not received these documents, despite submitting a FOIA request on August 18, 2025, with a request for expedited processing.

Without access to this critical information, I believe it is premature to move forward with the South Pond Hut proposal at this time. My reasoning is outlined below:

1. At the June 24, 2023, public meeting at Blueberry Hill Inn—and on other occasions—you stated that the Forest Service had decided to discontinue analyzing hut proposals on an individual basis. This shift was presented as a way to improve transparency and to better evaluate the cumulative impacts of a hut system across the forest. Moving forward with the South Pond Hut without such an analysis seems inconsistent with that approach.
2. I understand that this location was chosen, in the absence of a Master Plan from VHA, because it was previously a site of a four-season private lodge destroyed by arson in 2018. I am concerned by the suggestion to use remaining on site utilities. These utilities have not been maintained, and the area is visibly overgrown, as I observed during a recent hike. Until a current inspection report documenting the state and usability of this “support infrastructure” is shared with the public, proceeding with the proposal seems premature.
3. Constructing the South Pond Hut would undermine the pristine character that makes the Diverse Backcountry Management Area unique. The hut would not only alter the visual landscape but also increase foot traffic, mountain bike traffic, and snowmobile use, all of which would diminish the peaceful atmosphere and ecological integrity of the site. Amending the Forest Plan to allow construction of a luxury lodging at South Pond would also set a precedent for similar projects in other Diverse Backcountry areas of the GMNF.
4. The project map shows that the Rolston Rest Shelter is located less than a mile from the proposed hut site. This post-and-beam structure, built in 2004, accommodates eight

people. What is the justification for constructing a 700 sq. ft. “luxury hut” in such close proximity?

5. Finally, unlike hut systems such as the AMC’s in the White Mountains, where reservations are made by the bed, VHA allows parties to reserve entire huts regardless of group size. According to VHA’s own visitor monitoring data, the average party size is six guests per reservation, meaning four of the ten beds often go unused, limiting opportunities for others to stay. In some cases, couples have reserved an entire hut for themselves as a private retreat. In practice, VHA huts function more like Airbnbs, which is an inappropriate use of public lands.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge the Forest Service to refrain from moving forward with the South Pond Hut proposal until full documentation is available for public review and a comprehensive, forest-wide analysis of the hut system has been completed.

Thank you for your continued stewardship of the Green Mountain National Forest.

Respectfully,

Galina Chernaya