

August 1, 2025

Brooke M. Brown
District Ranger
White Mountain National Forest, Pemigewasset Ranger District
71 White Mountain Drive
Campton, NH 03223

Submitted via email:
Scott Hall
scott.hall@usda.gov

Re: Supplemental Comments of Standing Trees and Sierra Club New Hampshire Regarding Draft Environmental Assessment and Preliminary Finding of No Significant Impact for Lost River Integrated Resource Project #63401, Pemigewasset Ranger District, White Mountain National Forest

Dear Ranger Brown:

Standing Trees and Sierra Club New Hampshire submit the following supplemental submission to further elaborate upon its previously submitted comment (“Standing Trees Comment”) on the Draft Environmental Assessment and Preliminary Finding of No Significant Impact (“Draft EA”) for the Lost River Integrated Resource Project (“Project” or “Lost River IRP”).¹ These comments provide additional information and express further concerns pertaining to the Service’s consideration of the Project’s impacts to transportation and to the northern long-eared bat (“NLEB”).

First, the Forest Service (“Service”) has not taken a hard look at the transportation impacts of the Project in the Draft EA. *See* Standing Trees Comment at 30. Compounding this failure, the Service has never completed a National Environmental Policy Act (“NEPA”) review for forest-wide transportation needs. In 2015, the Service completed a “transportation analysis process... for long term administration of the national forest’s transportation system.” Draft EA at 3. Although the Service chose to use the term “analysis,” such a characterization is misleading in the context of NEPA. The 2015 report was published without NEPA review or a record of

¹ Although the formal comment period has concluded, the Lost River Project website states that “[c]omments, including anonymous comments, will be accepted at any time.” Given the short passage of time since the close of the comment period, this supplemental comment should be given full consideration during the Service’s environmental review of the Project.

decision, lacking transparency and accountability, including requisite opportunities for public input and agency response. This document is still not available for public review during this Project's NEPA process.

When Standing Trees asked for the Transportation Analysis Process ("TAP") previously, the Service sent a link, but the link directs to the National Forest's Land and Resource Management page, where the document does not appear to be posted. The Service admitted in a June 28, 2022 email to Standing Trees that "There is not a decision document associated with the [TAP]. The TAP provided recommendations based on roads information that was compiled at the time, including public involvement. The TAP output is essentially the map already provided and a large database, from which we've pulled the relevant information for inclusion in the Notice of Proposed Action." E-mail from Johnida Dockens, Forest Service (June 28, 2022, 17:02 EST) (on file with Standing Trees) (Exhibit A). This map, however, is vague and inadequate for review, and without an accompanying analysis document, the Service has failed to meet the requirements of the NEPA process. To lawfully complete a transportation analysis for the Project, the Service must undertake a full and robust NEPA review for forest-wide and project-level transportation needs.

Second, recent Service disclosures related to the Waterville Valley Resort Proposed Expansion EIS suggest additional concerns about the Lost River IRP's potential to contribute to loss of NLEB habitat. *See* Standing Trees Comment at 25. The 2021 "Bat Impact Analysis" prepared by North East Ecological Services for Waterville Valley Resort, obtained by Standing Trees after the close of the EIS scoping period, indicates that there is a high level of species diversity and evenness compared to other sampled sites. The Bat Impact Analysis notes: "Whereas many projects in the northeast currently have myotone bat activity levels well below 1%, the current data suggest a much higher abundance of these species." Waterville Valley Resort Town Gondola and Skiing Expansion REVISED (V3) Project Proposal Letter at 42 (Exhibit B). It is possible that the nearest known NLEB hibernaculum to Waterville Valley is located immediately adjacent to areas where logging is proposed to occur in the Lost River IRP, with less than 10 miles, as the crow, or bat, flies, between them. Specifically, the Draft EA states that there "is [a known hibernaculum] in the [Lost River IRP] vicinity (0.15 miles from the project area boundary and 1.3 miles from the nearest point of the action area)." Draft EA at 11. Considering these local habitat features, the Service has failed to adequately assess the threat of proposed Project activities on NLEB in and around the Project area and failed to adequately analyze or adopt plans that will reduce harms to the endangered species that they readily acknowledge live in the area.

In this context, Standing Trees requests consideration of a further alternative to the Project as proposed, in addition to those Standing Trees has already presented. Standing Trees Comment at 18. Specifically, we request that the Service consider an alternative that would prohibit harvesting trees greater than 3 inches in diameter in the Project area to protect NLEB habitat. According to the Service's analysis in the Draft EA and Biological Evaluation for the Webster Cliff Trail Relocation, such a measure would result in a "No Effect" finding for the NLEB. Webster Cliff Trail Relocation Biological Evaluation at 8 (Exhibit C). Where the Service believes that the best way to cause "No Effect" to the NLEB in the Webster Cliff Trail region is

harvesting trees no greater than 3 inches in diameter, implementing this standard for the Lost River IRP would be a reasonable alternative for the Service to consider here.

Standing Trees and Sierra Club New Hampshire appreciate your consideration of these supplemental comments on the Draft EA.

Respectfully submitted,

STANDING TREES

By its attorneys:

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SIERRA CLUB NEW HAMPSHIRE

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