

Data Submitted (UTC 11): 2/18/2023 1:47:51 PM

First name: Erika

Last name: Farmer

Organization:

Title:

Comments: To Whom It May Concern,

I am sure you have received many compelling messages about the telephone gap project and why a massive logging project like this is damaging to our climate, clean water and biodiversity here in Vermont. Why it is paramount to protect public forests and ancient trees for future generations. While all of this is true and critical for your consideration and hopefully ultimate your decision to stop this project. I would like to share a different perspective.

I am a lifelong practitioner of nature-based spirituality and a member of a spiritual tradition and community that holds the earth and all its natural inhabitants sacred, especially trees. This project is particularly damaging to myself and all my fellow practitioners of nature-based spiritual practice, including indigenous communities like the Abenaki. The forests and natural spaces in Vermont are our sacred places, where we worship and connect with the Divine. A loss of ancient forests is not only detrimental to the environmental future of this state and the planet but also to our collective cultural and spiritual traditions.

Although, it would be more than enough to say that this project will be in violation of President Biden's historic Executive Order from Earth Day 2022 or that it will likely push endangered species like the Northern Long-eared Bat into extinction. Or to mention that it would put our clean water resources at risk since it threatens important headwaters for Otter Creek, which flows into Lake Champlain, as well as the White River, a tributary of the Connecticut River.

I know you have also heard that of the 11,800 acres proposed for logging, the Telephone Gap timber sale proposes nearly 2,600 acres of logging inside the 16,000-acre Pittenden Inventoried Roadless Area, second largest in the entire Green Mountain National Forest and one of the largest wildlands in Vermont. These wildlands are not only critical for Vermont's ecosystems and wildlife as well as the collective global ecosystems, but, as I said, this land is sacred to many, many people and groups in our communities. I believe that future generations have just as much a right to find a spiritual connection to these ancient trees and wild spaces as current and past generations have.

I ask that you broaden your perspective on the damage that this project can cause not just to our ecosystems in Vermont or to the planet but also to our sacred traditions and our cultural ancestry. We have an obligation to honor our indigenous communities and traditions as well as to honor all who seek spiritual refuge in Vermont's wild places.

Thank you, Erika Farmer