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Comments: I am writing to ask our Green Mountain National Forest managers to halt the proposed Telephone Gap Integrated Resource Project and bring the out-dated 2006 Forest Plan on which it is based up to date to address today's overriding crisis of climate change. This redirection to carbon sequestration on our public forestland here in Vermont should be a state and national priority. There is no better, more capable, and securely funded entity than our National Forest Service to make this happen.

I don't pretend to be an expert in the field of forestry, but I come from a farming background and am a woodlot owner in Vermont's Current Use program. I've seen the degradation of forests on State and private land under management where timber production is the primary objective. Most of Vermont's woodland is in private ownership, and the orientation towards short-term wood production makes it very difficult to manage woodlands for the old age characteristics needed for carbon storage, long-rotation timber production, and other old forest attributes. The management treatments that USFS proposes for Telephone Gap can be applied on already much-harvested public and private lands, but not on this portion of the Green Mountain National Forest.

The Integrated Resource Project Proposal's approach to climate change appears to be to harvest existing hardwoods on the approximately 12,000 acres in order to reorient the forest for a warming planet in the future (p. 9-10). This turns logic on its head: even if deer predation and hay-scented fern infestation were controlled for the next 10 -15 years, the storage value of carbon in new growth would be a fraction of that in the existing trees. What is needed NOW are the maturing and older hardwoods to continue storing carbon during their life cycle to help us avoid the immediate warming crisis.

Telephone Gap is one of the few areas of our National Forest where a mature Northern Hardwood Forest exists without recent disturbance by [ldquo]Early Successional Habitat Creation[rdquo], clearcutting and shelter cuts, and other methods of manipulation to meet goals for wood output, populations of certain wildlife game species, and recreation. Now is the time and Telephone Gap is the place for the USDA Forest Service to dedicate a sizable portion of this management area of 32,745 acres to play a significant role in our national effort to forestall climate change. Please consider this alternative: make the 11,801 acres an ecological reserve for carbon storage and biodiversity conservation.

This [ldquo]Strategic Climate Reserve[rdquo] would demonstrate for New England and the rest of the country how nature heals itself over time if left undisturbed. There will be multiple benefits of conserving this small segment of Green Mountain National Forest. Along with providing a carbon sink, it would be an ecological laboratory; a refuge for wildlife requiring old forests; and a resource for physical, mental and spiritual health for all of us. And some day, if you have the foresight to act now, Vermont will have a place that will allow our great, great-grandchildren to know what an old growth forest looks like.

Thank you for this chance to tell you how important the decisions you make are to me.