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Title:

Comments: My name is Jacob Powsner, I'm a co-owner at Baird Farm Maple Syrup in North Chittenden, VT. Our farm is located within the project area. Firstly, thank you for all you all do and the myriad of services you provide to this community. Reading through these comments, I share many sentiments expressed by other commenters here.

Before I share how I feel about the details of the scoping doc, I really want to talk about the process for better or worse. I'm a process nerd.

I got a whole lot of feelings, so thank you to whoever actually reads this (Jay?). This proposal has felt like a fight in this community, which is just sad. Instead of having listening sessions and deep community input into how best to fulfill objectives, this whole process has been kinda [suffocating] from the start- for lack of a better word. I was fortunate enough to attend several of the informational meetings. They were informative! I learned a lot. But still, if I'm being candid, the process hasn't come across as being receptive and open to the public. As a spectator and participant, the conversation from the Forest Service comes across as having felt siloed and one-directional. It's a conversation [from] not [with]. I've gotten the impression that the public is a factor to be [managed] or [educated], not one to be [listened to] or invited into the planning. For example, the way the meeting at Barstow was planned, resulted in a format that didn't allow for quality engagement. Considering that was essentially a PSA for the comment period, it again felt like, [come ask us questions and we will educate you on what we wanna do in bifurcated department expertise. ] Just so I'm clear, this is NOT a knock on the staff. You have an AMAZING staff, some of whom I know personally and have a deep respect for like Suzanne Gifford and John McCann.

I think the media coverage up to this point similarly captures this disconnect. I mean several online publications called this one of the top 10 worst logging projects on federal lands. I know that doesn't mean anything. There are tons of opinions online, but it does seem like something was flawed in the direction of the project for a long time. Despite that disconnect visible to any spectator last year, we're now looking at a proposed action plan that seems unrevised by public opinion. In the proposed document you list ways you've listened to public stakeholders. But looking through the over a thousand written comments, and 13k signatures, those opinions aren't anywhere in this doc and you've been receiving these opinions for months.

The thing is, the battle lines were already drawn, most folks [picked sides] months ago. There wasn't ever any space for a middle ground. From the start, the conversations on timber harvests that the forest service gave were: [this is how and why we manage forests in the way that we do]. And then, folks who attended either conclude I agree or I don't agree. I think folks felt like their concerns were completely ignored, especially when a scoping doc is released (later than expected) nearly identical to the prescoping doc widely criticized. That's how I felt. I understand you're not in control of certain aspects of the process timeline. It's unfortunate and sad because the structure of the conversations and timeline has resulted in deep divisiveness that will cause harm to this community for years. It's just sad considering the years of work that went into this proposal. That work became so clearly out of touch with the community sentiment. Of course, not everyone is ever gonna be happy. People are difficult or impossible to please. But given the amount of engagement you've received here it's clear that what's been proposed is deeply controversial. This isn't the moderate, middle-of-the-road proposal that it's being marketed as. In fact, the town of Chittenden planning commission said as much in terms of the [scale] - and that group of stakeholders got a personal pitch of the project.

Here's how I feel on the scoping doc:

There are some aspects I support:

-I think getting rid of the dam is a good idea.

-I support the maple tapping permit- David Kraus is a good operator and would be a good lessor.

Here are some things I feel neutral on:

-On the whole, I agree with some of the trail management decisions. I have questions on access, parking, and maintenance. But on the whole, I think this community supports them.

-The proposed hut. I mean we know what happened to the last one, right?

Here's what I do not support:

-The vistas scenery management.

-ALL insecticides and herbicides. I mean glyphosate, triclopyr [hellip].really? This is a product that's illegal in many countries. I keep bees, along with many others in the proposed project area. Please don't do this. There's SO much research on why we shouldn't use these products. We're in a mass extinction event that disproportionately impacts insects. Under no circumstances should we be using any insecticides and herbicides in our national forests- especially in what sounds like a wet area. Midacloprid, dinotefuran, emamectin benzoate, and azadirachtin pose a danger to many forms of life. People live here. People use this water.

The fact that this doc proposes putting poison in our community honestly erodes a great deal of trust in the entire proposal.

-On the related note, [ldquo]Roadside and trailhead emerald ash borer hazard tree mitigation[rdquo], I think it makes sense to take down only the ash trees that are directly around town roadways and parking areas/trailheads. That would be in compliance with the recommendation by Rutland Regional Planning Commission. Those have proven to be dangerous elsewhere. I think it's a big stretch to say the ash poses a threat to forest visitors deeper in parcels and on trails. Non-ash species fall on the trails and forest roads all the time. The vast majority of human injury as a result of emerald ash borer happens on highways.

-I don't support ANY of the proposed timber harvests. If it were up to me, I wouldn't approve of any of it. To be clear, I don't identify as anti-logging like many of the commenters. We pull timber off our farm and do timber stand improvements. I had voiced this in earlier meetings, I just simply don't agree with many of the rationale and assumptions inherent in the forest plan and proposed action. The entire scoping doc conversation from [ldquo]Climate Change[rdquo] to [ldquo]Carbon[rdquo] is based on assumptions that have been widely disputed by other commenters from carbon storage to what a [ldquo]healthy[rdquo] forest looks like. This capital logic of assessing forests for timber value or carbon value or any value categorization is deeply troubling. We don't own the forest. We belong to the forest. We all know we're in a climate crisis that kills life on earth every day. Our local decisions have a profound impact in aggregate on the rest of the planet. We know that the major drivers of the climate crisis are fossil fuel consumption and deforestation (including thinning). The beginning of the proposed action seems to note that the current forest health is a direct result of the past 200 years of management. A prevailing assumption throughout this document is that we are so much smarter and better at pulling timber out than our parents and grandparents. I think that's dangerously naive. Another example of these assumptions is that the forest lacks climate resilience. [ldquo]There is a need to increase the resilience of forests' Really? These woods are incredibly resilient, we don't need to manage this. We need to leave them alone. How

do we know this parcel wouldn't be better if we just left it alone? Where's the valuation on letting things continue to rewild? I could go on at length but I'm not sure it's worth it. The whole scoping doc and the 2006 forest plan exist within a paradigm that only allows one solution- management through harvest. The solutions to our problems don't lie in the paradigm that created them.

I could at length list objections that fit squarely into the logic of this report. We could chat about the wear and tear on town roads or ATV usage. We can talk about barriers to public access on the trails. We could debate how the proposed action doc treats age distributions. We can talk about the pros and cons of the [renewable fuel] that's eluded to[hellip].

I just don't want to. I don't want to legitimize the premise [ndash]the management paradigm that this project exists in. It's not a world I want to live in.

Just so I'm clear on my position, I don't think we should harvest any trees or do any proposed stand improvement. We shouldn't because that's what the overwhelming amount of folks are saying.

Thank you for reading this.

Epilogue (lol)

Here are other thoughts I think need to be addressed before even any next step happens:

What about the water inlet for Rutland Water on Mendon brook? I don't think we've seen how the project will impact the watershed quality for the water treatment at Mendon Brook.

What about all the other timber harvests happening on public and private lands? Many of these are on the town forests directly abutting proposed cuts. The town of Chittenden has been moving forward to cut town forests as well as Proctor in the watershed parcel. What about Brandon town Forest? Goshen town forest? Not to mention, private parcels. There's a lot of cutting already happening in the proposed project area. Much of the discussion of forest habitat and successional forests seems to be framed in a vacuum. How are you addressing these proposed and ongoing projects in this plan?