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Organization:

Title:

Comments: Please find my letter on behalf of Green Mountain Conservation Group attached, thank you!

Thank you for the opportunity to comment to the Saco Ranger District of the White Mountain National Forest on the Sandwich Vegetation Management Project. We understand that there will be another period for public comment and commend you on that decision as we only learned of the proposal last week along with many other area residents. It will be essential to have all stakeholders involved in the decision-making process for this plan that affects 1,325 acres at the headwaters of the Ossipee Watershed. Allowing town officials, residents, businesses, watershed organizations, recreationists, along with forest, soil, hydrology, and wildlife experts to weigh in on the proposal is essential to ensure that our communities are heard and that the project has no negative impacts to the area's natural resources, economies or quality of life.

Named after Green Mountain in Effingham, the mission of GMCG is to promote an awareness of and appreciation for clean water and the wise use of shared natural resources across the Ossipee Watershed and advocate strategies to protect them. GMCG's research, education, advocacy and land protection programs benefit the 14,000+ year-round residents of Eaton, Effingham, Freedom, Madison, Ossipee, Sandwich, and Tamworth as well as the Sacopee Valley of Maine. Protecting the environmental quality of our watershed is of immeasurable value not only to local residents and business owners, but also to the 30,000+ annual visitors and out of state property owners drawn to the region by our lakes, rivers, forests and mountains and the abundant opportunities they offer to recreate and appreciate the natural world.

GMCG has been monitoring the Cold River and Bearcamp River, as well as 27 other water bodies in the Ossipee Watershed for over two decades in collaboration with the University of New Hampshire, the Saco River Corridor Commission in Maine, and NH Department of Environmental Services. Our Regional Interstate Volunteers for the Rivers and Ecosystems of Saco (RIVERS) program encompasses one watershed shared between two states and 26 towns, monitoring the water health of the entire Saco Watershed from the mountains to the ocean. We follow an EPA approved Quality Assurance Project Plan and collect data on conductivity, dissolved oxygen, temperature and pH bi-weekly, and turbidity, total phosphorus, nitrogen, dissolved organic carbon and anion and cation data monthly from assigned tributaries of the Ossipee Lake system. We also conduct biomonitoring in the Bearcamp and Cold Rivers with local elementary schools in Tamworth and Sandwich, and collaborate with NH Fish & Game and Trout Unlimited on the Trout in the Classroom program which relies on the high-water quality of our rivers and streams in order to release the trout.

In the past twenty-five years we have partnered with many lake associations, watershed organizations, state organizations, professionals and volunteers to complete Watershed Management Plans and structural BMPs to improve and protect water quality of our local rivers, lakes and ponds. Most recently, we collaborated with NH Fish & Game, Saco Headwaters Alliance, North Country Council, NH Geological Survey of NH Department of Environmental Services and UNH Technology Transfer Center to assess over 400 stream crossings in the Ossipee Watershed for structural integrity, aquatic organism passage, geomorphic compatibility and flood vulnerability. One hundred and ninety-two of these crossings are located in the upper part of our watershed in the towns of Sandwich and Tamworth.

Since this proposed project involves development in the headwaters of the Ossipee Watershed we want to make sure that the Forest Service has considered potential impacts to all of the natural resources and communities involved. And, since water knows no boundaries and a decline in water quality would have an impact on many communities downstream, we request more explanation and details on the ways in which the USFS plans to prevent any decline in water quality of rivers and streams in addition to flooding. As you may be aware, the May

and July flood events of 2023 were particularly destructive to properties, road networks, and aquatic environments in Ossipee Watershed towns, costing millions of dollars to repair roads and stream crossing infrastructure, and leading to increased erosion, sedimentation, nutrient loading and resulting cyanobacteria blooms.

Climatologists have predicted more frequent and more intense precipitation events in our region according to the NH 2021 Climate Assessment, and according to hydraulic modeling and the state's Aquatic Restoration Mapper, between 20-25% of the stream crossings in Sandwich and Tamworth are vulnerable to flooding and overtopping during 2-year storm events, and over 80% are vulnerable to flooding and overtopping during 100-year storm events. The proposed project must not exacerbate flooding, erosion and associated water quality issues downstream to the detriment of our communities and natural resources.

Thank you for taking into consideration our concerns and we look forward to learning more about your proposal in a future field trip as well as how you intend to protect the natural resources for the long- term.