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Organization:

Title:

Comments: We are writing to you on behalf of the New England members of Backcountry Hunters & Anglers (BHA). BHA members are hunters and anglers who support policies that promote backcountry experiences, healthy fish and wildlife habitat, and sound stewardship of public lands and waters.

The Green Mountain National Forest is part of one of the largest and most important areas of generally remote publicly owned and accessible land in Vermont. We consider it a high priority area with regard to our values of solitude, adventure, self-reliance, conservation, and access to high-quality fair chase hunting and fishing experiences. With those values in mind, our comments are below.

1. We support the forestry component of Option C, which will create or maintain needed early successional habitat within the 3-5% Vermont Conservation Design target, while also avoiding stands with complexity and age structure similar to old growth forests, as well as utilizing ecological forestry principles to enhance old-growth characteristics in other stands. We feel option C represents a valuable opportunity to address the decrease in habitat quality across the GMNF to support the year-round requirements of our full suite of wildlife, while also addressing other key forest types in need of enhancement as well as forest and habitat resiliency in the face of climate change. We continue to be concerned about expanding trail development.

2. A large concern is that there is proposed trail expansion despite mention that, [ldquo]the challenges involved in maintaining existing trails and facilities to desired standards could lead to increases in health and safety risks and potential damage to resources such as soil, water, and fisheries.[rdquo] This alone should give conservationists and land managers pause about new trail construction. When much of the rest of the work planned in this IRP is about maintaining and restoring conditions of ecological health, expanding something that is already a challenge to maintain seems counterproductive.

1. We are concerned about trail expansion impact on wildlife. While the physical structures of hiking, biking, and ski trails may not have prominent ecological effects, our concern is that the high-density human presence associated with the ongoing use of these trails can profoundly affect both wildlife and the backcountry characteristics of the landscape. (see Wildlife Recreation- Understanding and Managing the Effects of Trail Use on Wildlife, By Meredith Naughton, UVM, 2021) (link in footnote)1.

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1. We support decommissioning of poorly designed/located trails.

2. We also broadly support accessible trails that serve a variety of mobility types, if they are located close to existing infrastructure.

2. Regarding roads, we advocate for no permanent expansion. We strongly support culvert work that assists in flood resiliency and aquatic organism passage. We also support gates and access areas that allow for dispersed recreation on GMNF land.

1. We continue to be concerned about the addition of huts on the GMNF. There should be areas where the touch of human existence is exceedingly light, perhaps, slightly paraphrasing the Wilderness Act, where man himself is a visitor, whose presence does not remain. There are many cabins available to interested parties in nearby towns, where infrastructure and its maintenance have little-to-no impact on wild experiences.

2. Maple tapping on the GMNF, and its associated infrastructure, are a concern to us. Plastic tubing strung

through the woods, punctuated by the sound of a vacuum pump running all spring, are counter to what an experience on USFS land should be about.

We look forward to seeing these changes in the plan.

Thank you for your continued work on behalf of our public lands.