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Title:

Comments: Dear Colleagues with the White Mountain National Forest: The Trust for Public Land would like to submit the following comments with respect to the Tarleton Integrated Resources Project (IRP), to extend our thanks to WMNF staff and share historical context of the lands involved in the IRP. Please note, we are not issuing a comment on a desired course of action for the WMNF as TPL remains deferential to the public engagement process and professional recommendations of USFS staff. The Trust for Public Land has deeply valued our partnership with the US Forest Service nationally for almost 50 years, and our local partnership with the White Mountain National Forest for almost 30 years. During that time, we have supported many different land protection projects through expansion of WMNF lands - large landscape scale conservation efforts around the Pond of Safety and Bretton Woods, as well as many significant trail and trailhead projects such as David Path, Castle Trail head, and Diana's Bath, and are actively working on new inholding protection in Jackson. We are a strong proponent of the multiple use mission of the USFS. We would like to thank the USFS for reopening the public comment period to allow for a broader, more inclusive process. When we were made aware of the proposal by the USFS to conduct timber management activities in the area, we quickly weighed in on the deficiencies of the public notice and public engagement -- conducted during the unprecedented challenges of the COVID 19 pandemic where typical channels of public notice did not suffice. Our outreach to several partners, including the WMNF leadership, led to what we believe is a more open and inclusive public process that is now occurring. Thank you very much for taking these process concerns seriously. With respect to the proposed Tarleton Integrated Resource Project, we also wanted to make sure the current WMNF staff had the benefit of the history of the conservation effort around Lake Tarleton as a decision is advanced, given that the TPL conservation project on the subject lands took shape over 20 years ago. TPL spent countless hours and significant resources into permanent conservation of Lake Tarleton and the surrounding forests. This was a multi-year, multi-agency, and multi NGO partner effort. The results of land conservation work between 1997 and 2004 led to the creation of a NH Fish and game boat launch on Lake Tarleton, a new NH State Park on Lake Tarleton, a 1,650 acre working forest, protected through a Federal Forest Legacy conservation easement, on the other side of Route 25C from Lake Tarleton, permanently removing shoreline development for three lakes (Lake Tarleton, Lake Catherine, and Lake Constance), and approximately 3,500 acres added to the White Mountain National Forest for the enjoyment of local residents and visitors to the region. The goal of this approach for multiple public agency involvement was to protect this important recreational, cultural, and natural resource. There is continued forest management on the privately held land protected by a Forest Legacy conservation easement, public access to the water through NH State ownership, and natural resource and scenic conservation through USFS ownership. At the time, we also made efforts to create a visitors' center (either relocation of the WMNF District office, or a State visitor's center) onsite as well. Unfortunately, the visitor's center did not take shape, but we are deeply proud of all we accomplished in partnership with state and federal agencies, congressional delegation, and community members. We share this to document the history of TPL and partners' work on the property in adding key components to the Forest, with the help of many community members and donors and likely explains the keen interest so many folks are taking in the IPR proposal currently underway.

One path forward for consideration might be to fold future management decisions at Lake Tarleton into the upcoming Forest Management Plan revision process. This would ensure a complete and thorough public process to make future management decisions associated with Lake Tarleton as part of a more holistic Forest planning process. If you want any further details on the efforts around conserving the Lake Tarleton region, please do not hesitate to reach out, and thank you again for re-opening the public comment period to ensure a transparent and inclusive process thereby better addressing the associated challenges of public notice during the pandemic. We wish you luck and best wishes for a decision making process here and stand by to help answer any questions you may have of Trust for Public Land.