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Comments: It is important that we not only maintain but also increase the number of old growth and mature forests in Vermont (and the United States), as they are crucial for carbon sequestration and ecological diversity. This proposed project includes ~72,000 acres of land, of which nearly 32,000 acres are part of the Green Mountains National Forests, which include federally owned lands. This proposal encompasses "timber harvesting," an activity that was recently underscored as detrimental in President Biden's executive order advocating for the preservation of mature and old-growth forests. We need to preserve these lands-- "Together, extant old-growth and regenerating forests absorb ~2 gigatonnes of carbon (GtC) annually, making an important contribution to the terrestrial carbon sink" (<https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/ffgc.2020.00058/full>).

Mature and old-growth forests, particularly those with larger trees, are significant carbon sinks. They can maintain substantial carbon stocks and accumulation potential if protected from logging. There is such a rich and biodiverse ecosystem that relies on these lands for their natural resources and we are part of that too. Without mature and old-growth forests, how will we ever get closer to the nation's goal of net-zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050? The unprotected carbon stock in larger trees in mature stands can range from 36 to 68% of the total carbon in all trees, and simply put, larger trees have more biomass and thus more capacity to absorb and store carbon (<https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/ffgc.2022.1074508/full>). We are at a tipping point in which we need to maintain and protect these types of forests because once they are gone, they take hundreds of years to return, and we don't have time for that.

By keeping our forests protected now, we can continue to maintain the levels of biodiversity and carbon storage we have and reap the benefits of maintaining them in the years to come. The onset of old-growth characteristics occurs when the density of total forest carbon stored in live and dead biomass reaches 95% of the empirically derived maximum (<https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/ffgc.2022.1070372/full>). And we cannot see the benefits of forests at that level until we let them grow to that point. It's essential that we align our forest management practices with our climate goals and biodiversity needs. Based on this information, I strongly support Alternative A (no action). I have attached all referenced studies to this comment, and I encourage anyone to explore them for more details or information.