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First name: Karen

Last name: Bourque

Organization:

Title:

Comments: The Telephone Gap logging project puts a bullseye on an 11,800-acre parcel of mature and old growth trees northeast of Rutland, VT, an area larger in size than the City of Burlington. This massive timber sale would endanger the water quality of Chittenden Reservoir, introduce invasive species, release vast amounts of carbon to the atmosphere, and destroy habitat needed by threatened and endangered species like the Northern Long-eared Bat. Adding insult to injury, the project also proposes more than 2,500 acres of logging in one of Vermont's largest unprotected wildlands, a 16,000-acre "inventoried roadless area" that straddles the Long Trail and the crest of the Green Mountains south of Brandon Gap.

Mature and old growth forests excel at removing and storing carbon from the atmosphere. Ninety-two percent of the areas proposed for logging in the Telephone Gap timber sale are classified as mature or old by the Green Mountain National Forest, violating President Biden's historic Executive Order from Earth Day 2022, which directed the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) to protect these forests for the benefit of the climate and biodiversity. In December, the USFS withdrew a timber sale in Oregon called "Flat Country" because it targeted mature forests of up to 150 years in age. Telephone Gap proposes logging forests up to 160 years in age. If Flat Country was important to withdraw, why is the Telephone Gap timber sale moving forward?

The Northern Long-eared Bat is a species that is teetering on the edge of extinction. The USFS and Wildlife Service listed the bat as "endangered" in November 2022. The Northern Long-eared Bat prefers mature and old-growth forests for roosting and foraging - exactly the types of areas that are proposed for logging. Much of the Telephone Gap project area is suitable habitat for this endangered bat.

The Telephone Gap timber sale threatens important headwaters for Otter Creek, which flows into Lake Champlain, as well as the White River, a tributary of the Connecticut River. Logging threatens water supply areas like the Chittenden Reservoir, and risks exacerbating flooding in downstream communities. Imperiled brook trout and reintroduced populations of Atlantic salmon depend on cold, clear water flowing from these high mountain streams. The Telephone Gap timber sale proposes nearly 2,600-acres of logging inside the 16,000-acre Chittenden Inventoried Roadless Area, second largest in the entire Green Mountain National Forest and one of the largest wildlands in Vermont. Straddling an undeveloped and rugged section of the Long Trail from Brandon Gap south towards Chittenden Reservoir, this area is important for wildlife habitat and connectivity as well as quiet recreation.

Please consider stopping or greatly reducing the scope of this reckless project.

Thank you.