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Organization:

Title:

Comments: Dear Mr. Mattrick,

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the proposed Telephone Gap Integrated Resource Project. I am writing to voice my objections to the extensive logging proposed for this project.

I have visited the area within the project boundary many times over the last 50+ years. During that time, I have hiked all of the Long/Appalachian Trail and side trails (some sections multiple times), explored other routes on foot or bicycle, bushwhacked to some of the higher summits, and fished and paddled its waters. My early experiences here and elsewhere in the GMNF prompted me become a biologist and enjoy a career in natural resources.

I was always pleased whenever additional lands were acquired by the GMNF, thinking they would be protected from the extensive logging one often encounters on privately-owned forestland. This proposal shows that my belief this area of the GMNF is protected was misplaced.

The proposed action calls for logging on 11,800 acres, or one-third of the federal ownership. Much of this logging would take place in mature and old-growth stands. Since federal policy now recognizes the carbon sequestration benefits of uncut old-growth forests, it seems that clear cutting and other timber harvesting would run counter to that policy.

Further, these lands provide extensive habitat for species that require large undisturbed forests in order to thrive. Loss of mature and old-growth habitat is affecting species that call these areas home, reducing their numbers and putting them at risk of extinction. Since opportunities to provide such habitat are rather limited in Vermont, protection of the Telephone Gap lands from logging is imperative.

The effect of the proposed action on water quality is also a major concern. Project lands are the source of streams in two watersheds, providing cold, clean water to Otter Creek and the White River. Maintaining these upland watersheds in a natural condition will help to mitigate the impacts of climate change on these rivers, such as extended drought, more severe floods, and higher water temperatures. Both people and fish will benefit from maintaining these forested areas in their natural condition.

To conclude, I ask that you reconsider the proposed action and eliminate the timber harvests so this forest can continue to mature, sequestering carbon and protecting habitat and water quality far into the future.

Thank you for considering my comments.

Brian T. Fitzgerald