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Comments:

I've been a resident of Bethel VT for more than forty years. During that time I have hiked and skied extensively throughout the Green Mountain National Forest, especially within parts of the Telephone Gap Management Plan area. I also volunteer each year to help maintain a section of the Long Trail south of Bloodroot Gap. I've seen first-hand some of the exquisite mature forest slated for harvesting, such as the large stands in the Michigan Brook watershed and others.

This massive logging project of 11,800 acres- more than 90% of which is mature and old growth forest up to 160 years old- is a huge step in the wrong direction. Old forests are exceptional for sequestering and storing vast amounts of carbon, protecting water quality, and mitigating droughts and floods. Today, just 0.3% of New England forests are older than 150 years. And just last year President Biden issued an historic Executive Order, directing the US Forest Service to conserve mature and old-growth forests to benefit the climate and biodiversity.

The areas proposed for logging in the Telephone Gap timber sale have major concentrations of mature trees between 80-160 years old, which science shows accumulate and store the most carbon in the fight against climate change compared to young trees. The Green Mtn National Forest has greater carbon density than most forests in the Eastern US; we should be managing this public land for the benefit of the climate and biodiversity, not cutting it down. Private forests are the source of 96% of the timber supply in Vermont, so protecting public forests would have minimal impact on the wood products economy.

On a global scale, forest protection represents approximately half or more of the climate change mitigation needed to hold temperature rise. The largest 1% of trees store 30% of all aboveground forest carbon in the US. Public forests in New England store, on average, 30% more carbon than private forests. Research by the University of Vermont shows that New England's forests could store up to four times more carbon if we just let them grow old. Letting mature and old trees stand is one of the most effective things that we can do to combat climate change.

Mature and old forests matter for a lot more reasons than the carbon that they store. These same forests are also powerhouses for biodiversity, clean water, and climate resilience. Old forests excel at removing the phosphorus and nitrogen that drive algal blooms and dead zones in our rivers, lakes, and ponds. And they are exceptional at reducing the impacts of both floods and droughts by slowing, sinking, and storing water.