

Data Submitted (UTC 11): 2/20/2023 4:42:14 PM

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Organization:

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Comments: February 20, 2013

To the US Forest Service,

I am writing today to express my strong objection to the Forest Service's plans for logging in National Forests, especially the Telephone Gap project in Vermont. As an avid hiker and snow-shoer, citizen scientist and herbalist, I spend a good deal of time in the forests of Vermont, and have also enjoyed the magnificence of other National Forests in the US. Forests are very special places, and we need them now more than ever.

First of all, let me point out that this Telephone Gap logging project directly violates President Biden's historic Executive Order from Earth Day 2022, which directed the US Forest Service to protect mature forests for the benefit of the climate and biodiversity.

I think it is essential for us all, from individuals to businesses to decision-making entities like USFS, to shift our perspective on forests away from only economic needs and recognize the inherent and ecological benefits of forests that are wild. In other words, we have been increasingly "managing" forests by cutting them down, which causes many negative outcomes from soil compaction to loss of sequestered carbon. We must change the way we relate to forests, and nature by extension, and in turn align our values, laws and practices with a more holistic understanding of the importance of biodiversity and how natural ecological systems actually function. Forests are so much more than just timber! Even if we look at them from an economic perspective, non timber forest products are also quite valuable, and so are tourism, recreation and other values the beauty our national forests provide. There is plenty of privately owned land to supply wood products.

Much more important, however, especially at this time, are the critical ecological functions of forests in absorbing carbon, providing habitat for animals, birds, plants, insects and fungi who are all key members of the ecology, holding water and modulating weather, preventing soil erosion, and so many more less visible benefits. Specifically with respect to the Telephone Gap project, logging so much of this mature forest will negatively impact:

* The Northern Long-eared Bat prefers mature and old-growth forests for roosting and foraging. The US Fish and Wildlife Service listed the Northern Long-eared Bat as "endangered" in November 2022, and much of the Telephone Gap project area is suitable habitat for this endangered bat.

* Water quality and dynamics - the Telephone Gap timber sale threatens important headwaters for Otter Creek and the White River, which of course flow into larger bodies of water. Logging threatens local water supply areas like the Chittenden Reservoir, and will exacerbate flooding in downstream communities.

* On the global scale, forest protection represents approximately half or more of the climate change mitigation needed to hold temperature rise to 1.5 degrees Celsius. Research also shows that New England's forests could store two to four times more carbon if we just let them grow old. This adds up to an incredibly significant amount of carbon that the Green Mountain National Forest is able to sequester!!

* A significant chunk of the area proposed for logging is within the Pittenden Inventoried Roadless Area, second largest in the entire Green Mountain National Forest and one of the largest wild areas 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 cancel all plans for logging in National Forests, especially mature, biodiverse forests. We need to conserve everything that is home to these forests, everything that they support, conserve, stabilize and protect. If the Forest Service can cancel a proposed logging project in Oregon because it was not in line with President Biden's executive order, other similarly-aged forests can also be protected. The environmentalists of Vermont will continue to monitor your plans, and we will show up to save our forests!

Thank you for your time and attention.

Sincerely,

Elizabeth Bancroft
Orange, Vermont