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First name: Michael
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Comments: Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Telephone Gap IRP.
I am writing to express concern for the fact that Noise does not appear as a consideration in the 2006 Forest Plan. I see virtually no mention of Noise in and around the national forest; of the three singular occasions where the word Noise appears in Plan documents, those serve only to state that sound carries over distance and may impact some recreational activities. Meanwhile the sheer volume of Noise in our environment continues to soar upward. Since it does not appear to be monitored in any fashion, I arrive at this conclusion based on personal experiences working in outdoor settings across the state. Why is there no Noise monitoring on the landscape, and why is that not considered a factor in project planning? Do we feel that Vermont and the national forest system in particular are quiet enough that monitoring Noise is unnecessary?

When I say Noise, I refer to the loudness we hear all around us above and beyond any historical background levels. The biggest change I've experienced over the past two decades is that the world is getting louder. Everyone owns a leafblower (except me perhaps); these tools are now used eight months out of the year to blow away leaves, road sand, light snow, and grass clippings. Everyone uses them, often in packs operating as a coordinated crew. Leafblowers are even sold as toys for children; I'm curious to know here whether Forest Service crews operate them or contract for such services. I have serious concerns about this project on the basis of increasing overall Noise on the landscape. If a new hut is constructed with the Telephone Gap IRP, will leafblowers be utilized on or near the property? For that matter, will hut visitors be allowed to drone out over the pond for those gorgeous social media snaps?

Noise is important enough to be tracked with the human sensory system; we are evolved to collect sound, evaluate it, and respond accordingly. Many animals do the same; in fact, noise levels can negate an ideal block of habitat. Just because we are able to throw in the earplugs and live with the decibels, does not mean that forest creatures can do the same. It's an odd argument in my book to constantly hail the habitat-creation goal as we get out The Cut, fire up engines, build out the trails, and bring in the Noise. Something doesn't add up in that math.

Most of us have grown numb to the fact that noise is now virtually everywhere. Even from miles away, the sound of road traffic carries impressively far. There is a bill in the legislature addressing noise. Constant, loud noise has even been weaponized in human history and used in confrontations with dictators and cult leaders (Panama and Waco, TX). Noise was used in the nose of WWII dive bombers to further terrify civilian populations, as if the explosions were not quite enough. Nowadays we have commercial jets crisscrossing the sky and fighter jets maintaining national security. The price we pay for these luxuries and security guarantees is Noise and whatever effect it has on our bodies and nervous systems. We KNOW that Noise carries IMPACTS, so where is the analysis?

We also KNOW that silence and solitude and "connecting with nature" is vitally important to human health. The books and articles are endless; consider a recent article in The Washington Post: "Spending time in nature may lessen dementia." Visitors to Vermont come for many reasons, but high on their list is the desire to relax, to enjoy the peace and quiet, and to see the stars. City folks don't get to see the stars too often, so the Milky Way is a big deal. They say, over and over, that the stillness and the opportunity to discover quiet places is pure gold. Forest Service surveys reflect this sentiment. From 2015 to 2020, Green Mountain National Forest visitors listing relaxation as an activity increased by almost 13%. Simply viewing natural features and wildlife also showed a significant increase across the five year period. This is no accident; in these days of social upheaval, pandemics, and social media saturation, depression levels are up, suicide rates are up, loneliness is up, and reported anxiety levels are up. People need to chill out, and they come to Vermont, they come to the forests, they come to the

farmsteads to do just that. It is important to our visitors, and their visits are economically important to all citizens of the state. The Department of Tourism and Marketing publishes splashy full page ads captioned: "Silence Gives Us Something to Talk About." Just be sure to steer around the timber harvests and the road-building….

In conclusion, I feel a Noise assessment must be part of all Forest Service projects moving forward. Noise can be chronic, and Noise can be acute; while the removal of a concrete dam may bring about some days of equipment noise, that is nothing whatsoever like months and months of mountainside logging. There have certainly been advances over recent decades in the realm of noise reduction, but the booming growth of motorized activity is outpacing earlier gains. There are doubtless some worthy elements in the Telephone Gap IRP, but the failing over recent decades to hear the Noise and acknowledge the relevant science is a real concern and a real oversight.
I hope the agency is listening.