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Comments: I am an environmental journalist based in Bennington, and would like to register my concerns about the proposed Telephone Gap Integrated Resource Project. This forested area is crucial for multiple cultural and ecological reasons. One red flag for me is the building of miles of road to implement the plan and access trees to harvest. Even if allegedly "temporary", such roads create a significant ecological disturbance, undermining biodiversity of native species-already under threat on multiple fronts-and the overall health and resilience of the forest.

Many critics of the project point to the carbon-storing capacity of the mature (80-plus years) trees targeted for lumber, forest "management", and access. I concur. However, it's important to recognize that forests are not merely sticks of carbon: they are pivotal to the function of the water cycle. Research is revealing the extent to which natural forests drive the movement of moisture and wind, functions weakened by logging, thinning, and clearing for roads. Renowned forest scientist Anastassia Makarieva has documented the aftermath of forest disruptions in Canada and Russia, which set the stage for tree pestilence, fire, erosion, and other problems. I've interviewed Makarieva several times, and she emphatically states, "more natural forests, more stable [the] water cycle." Here we have natural forest, on its way to old growth. It is invaluable. And it would be foolish to impose any risk to its thriving.

Respectfully submitted,

Judith D. Schwartz

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