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Comments: I lived in Florence for 32 years; we were growing organic vegetables and making maple syrup, taking care of the soil, the forest and the creatures that lived there with us. We lived and worked in the shadow of the Taconic Mountains, but could climb up the ridge to view the Green Mountains to the east. When we had down time, we went canoeing at the Chittenden Reservoir or in the Otter Creek, and hiked up Mount Horrid in Rochester, or skied in the woods wherever trails led us.

Having hiked over the years in the forest of the Telephone Gap region of the Green Mountains, I feel compelled to ask you to reconsider your plans. The Telephone Gap Project is not taking care of the plants, the soil, the water or the wildlife in those forests. Your highly destructive logging job will devastate a huge area. It will endanger the water quality of Chittenden Reservoir with soil erosion, kill the mycorrhizal fungi that is needed to sustain the remaining trees, destroy habitat for animals that already live in those forests, and create new roads which will exacerbate the damage.

The practices of the U.S. Forest Service are based on management policies that were developed years ago. Many of these policies do not take recent research into account, nor do they seem to consider what role our forests will play to help mitigate climate changes. For example, Michael Kellett and Joan Maloof, et al, reviewed recent literature in their article "Forest-clearing to create early-successional habitats: Questionable benefits, significant costs" in a 2022 issue of *Frontiers*. The researchers conclude that "in the face of urgent global crises in climate, biodiversity, and human health, we conclude that public land forest and wildlife management programs must be reevaluated to balance the prioritization and funding of early-successional habitat with strong and lasting protection for old-growth and mature forests, and, going forward, must ensure far more robust, unbiased, and ongoing monitoring and evaluation." Their findings imply that many of the reasons that the Forest Service gives as explanation of why it must do these projects need to be reconsidered.

For example, you do not need to create openings for early successional habitat. Those openings will happen when a weather event occurs, or a tree succumbs to insect damage. That is the way forests developed over the millenium. Why do you need to assist that now, when many climate-related fires, tornadoes, and hurricanes across the country are already creating openings in the forest?

Furthermore, what are the species of birds that you want to establish open areas for? Were these species ever here before we had farms and hedge rows? Instead you should be worrying about the Northern Long-eared bat, which is endangered as of November 2022, and prefers mature and old-growth forests.

In her book, *Finding the Mother Tree*, Suzanne Simard reports on her years of researching the relationships between different tree species and the arbuscular fungi that helps the trees create a communication system throughout the roots. Cutting down many trees threatens this whole system of support. Plus, it results in loss of future carbon sequestration by all of the felled trees, soil erosion into streams, exposure of soil organisms to extreme temperatures with the loss of shade in summer and leaf debris in winter. AND loss of habitat for all of the birds that already lived there before you cut it down.

Please reconsider and withdraw this project.