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Comments: Thank you for the time and effort to establish this report for the HMU on the Telephone Gap Forest Unit. My primary interest in response to this project is the development of early successional habitat that is in dire need for the survival of 54 species of Greater Concern throughout the state of Vt. and nationally.

As a member of the Ruffed Grouse Society, my focal point will be on ruffed grouse and woodcock survival. Your information tables listed 542 acres of even-aged regeneration out of a total of 11,801 acres of total timber harvest. This roughly represents 5% of the total harvest. This aligns with the pre-European settlement data estimates. Albeit these are just estimates. I personally feel the percentage could be increased to 10% on this project and be within the parameters of best management practices allowable by the science. The forest managers within the RGS maintain these same thoughts.

In the latest issue of the Covers Magazine [RGS] ruffed grouse populations have decreased by 50% over the last 20 years. Increased mortality associated with the West Nile virus and changes in predator-prey dynamics, climate, and land use have further exacerbated the decline in grouse populations [RGS quote].

The Vermont Wildlife Action Plan [2015] made light of the increase of solar arrays on the Vt. landscape along with wind turbines. These projects take away suitable habitats. Many solar arrays are being installed in fields that would potentially revert to early successional habitat. The rate of land development in Vt. is double the population growth [ Center for Rural Studies 2008 ] in mostly rural communities. Again this leads to habitat loss due to degradation, conversion fragmentation, or lack of needed successional stages.

More attention is needed to be given to wildlife that depends on the young forest. Of these 11,801 acres, I'm curious about the average number of grouse that would be expected to live here under suitable habitat conditions as opposed to a current [ today ] population assessment on these 11,801 acres under management. I have no objections to the addition of permanent or temporary roads to carry out the objective of more early successional habitat. Road structures provide clover etc. for grouse. Insects become more abundant as a source of protein. Simply put, without the habitat that this project can provide our species of Greater Concern will not survive.

Thank

You

Dennis Fournier

