

Data Submitted (UTC 11): 3/12/2023 3:20:52 PM

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Comments: I am writing in opposition to the Telephone Gap Resource Project which threatens 11,800-acres of mostly mature and old trees. This massive timber sale would endanger the water quality of Chittenden Reservoir, introduce invasive species, release vast amounts of carbon to the atmosphere, and destroy habitat needed by threatened and endangered species like the Northern Long-eared Bat. The project also proposes more than 2,500-acres of logging in one of Vermont's largest unprotected wildlands, a 16,000-acre "inventoried roadless area" that straddles the Long Trail and the crest of the Green Mountains south of Brandon Gap.

The areas proposed for logging in the Telephone Gap timber sale have major concentrations of mature trees between 80-160 years old, which science shows accumulate and store the most carbon in the fight against climate change compared to young trees. The GMNF has greater carbon density than most forests in the Eastern US; we should manage this public land for the benefit of the climate and biodiversity, not cut it down.

Despite the rarity of old forests across New England, the Telephone Gap timber sale targets 10,855-acres of mature and old forest up to 160 years of age, or 92% of the total area proposed for logging. Because of this, Telephone Gap has been called one of the worst logging projects on federal public lands by Climate Forests, a national coalition of 120 environmental groups.

Research by the University of Vermont shows that New England forests could store 2 to 4 times more carbon if we just let them grow old. Letting mature and old trees stand is one of the most effective things that Vermonters can do to combat climate change and extinction. Private forests are the source of 96% of the timber supply in Vermont, so protecting public forests would have minimal impact on the wood products economy. We must put our public forests on a different path.

These same forests are also powerhouses for biodiversity, clean water, and climate resilience. Many of New England's most imperiled species, including pine marten, Northern Long-eared Bats, and brook trout, thrive in healthy, old forests. Old forests excel at removing the phosphorus and nitrogen that drive algal blooms and dead zones in our rivers, lakes, and ponds. And they are exceptional at reducing the impacts of both floods and droughts, by slowing, sinking, and storing water.

We stand at an environmental crossroads right now and it is absolutely vital that old growth forests are protected for the health and future of this planet and all of its rich life.

Thank you for listening.