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Organization:

Title:

Comments: I am writing this public comment as a Vermonter, born in Middlebury, who loves my state, the people, and the Green Mountains. More importantly, I write in concern about the threat posed by climate chaos to our environment and life support systems of our planet. I write because the opportunity to save what is most precious is rapidly diminishing to the point where future generations may inherit a radically altered environment and landscape.

Old forests are the best, in fact, the only known system for sequestering and storing vast amounts of carbon, protecting water quality, and mitigating droughts and floods. Today, just 0.3% of New England forests are older than 150 years.

The Forest Service's plan for the Telephone Gap timber sale is to log in 11,800 acres, including major concentrations of mature trees between 80-160 years old. A substantial body of scientific research has shown that trees in that age range accumulate and store more than young trees, making mature forests critical systems for mitigating the effects of global climate change. The Green Mountain National Forest has greater carbon density than most forests in the Eastern US. This public land should be managed for the benefit of the climate and biodiversity, which means not cutting it down.

On the global scale, forest protection could account for half or more of the climate change mitigation needed to hold temperature rise to 1.5 degrees C. The largest 1% of trees store 30% of all above ground forest carbon in the US. On average, New England's public forests store 30% more carbon than private forests. Tax dollars should not be spent to subsidize cutting old trees on public lands.

Research by the University of Vermont shows that New England forests could store 2 to 4 times more carbon if they are just left to grow old. Leaving mature and old trees standing is one of the most effective things that the Forest Service can do to combat climate chaos. 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.

The most recent management plan for the GMNF, from 2006, is outdated and insufficient for addressing the climate emergency. It is not based on current science.

Eleven months ago, President Biden issued an Executive Order directing the US Forest Service to conserve mature and old-growth forests to benefit the climate and biodiversity. In December, the Forest Service canceled a timber sale in Oregon called "Flat Country" because it violated the intent of President Biden's Executive Order. Then, in January, the Biden Administration reinstated protections for Alaska's Tongass National Forest, protecting the largest expanses of old-growth forest remaining in the U.S.

By proposing to cut some of the oldest forests in New England, the Telephone Gap plan runs counter to President Biden's Executive Order and is at odds with reasonable forest management policy that prioritizes climate mitigation.

I care about the non-human species that we share our state and this planet with. The Northern Long-eared Bat is teetering on the brink of extinction as the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service acknowledged last November when it listed the species as "endangered". The bat's habitat is mature and old-growth forests, which it needs for roosting and foraging. That is exactly the habitat that would be destroyed by logging in the Telephone Gap project.

I fear that the Telephone Gap timber sale threatens important headwaters for Otter Creek, which flows into Lake Champlain, and the White River, which flows into the Connecticut River, a watershed in which I now live. I worry about the effects of logging on my friends on the west side of the Green Mountains, including on water supply areas and the risks of increased flooding in downstream communities. I am concerned that logging will damage water quality in cold, clear mountain streams.

The Telephone Gap timber sale proposes logging more than 2,500 acres 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. This publicly owned tract is important as habitat and connectivity, as well as quiet recreation.

I ask the Forest Service to withdraw the Telephone Gap timber sale proposal.

Respectfully,  
Stuart Blood