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Comments: At this time in the history of our planet, global warming and devastating loss of biodiversity are humanity's greatest challenges. Intact forests are one of the best ways to mitigate both these crises. Growing existing forests intact to their ecological potential is an effective, low cost, and immediate approach to sequestering carbon and providing habit for biodiversity. Growing the existing forest at Telephone Gap Integrated Resource Project is what needs to happen!

The maps for the project show that the stand age of most of the trees is between 80 to 160 years old. The GMNF has greater carbon density than most forests in the Eastern US. It should not be cut down. The US Forest Service Management plan takes the approach that logging will make the forests healthier. They do no know that; especially at this time of global warming. There are many reasons not to go ahead with the planned logging.

We know that diverse forests are resilient forests. We know that these forests have a mycorrhizal network that is destroyed by logging. This network helps to keep forests healthy. It takes upwards of 20 years for that network to reestablish itself when a forest is logged. In an older forest, much of that carbon is down in the ground. If you open it up and sunlight hits the ground level, decomposition rates accelerate and you get a huge flush of carbon coming out of the ground and going back into the atmosphere. The beauty of our forests as they get older is they become huge carbon sinks, not just in the wood above ground but all that carbon in the ground. When we cut them we not only remove the carbon that's going through the wood products, but we're releasing all that carbon out of the soil.

As forests age and develop, the biotic diversity in the soil just increases. This is what holds the water, the headwaters of the Otter Creek and White River. Logging increases the risk of flooding downstream and also risks our water supplies. There is recent research about older forests that did not exist when the Telephone Gap management plan was first written in 2006. Soil science is a significant part of it.

We now know what a climate crisis we are facing. We are already living it. And the northeast is warming faster than any other region of the country. I have lived in Vermont for 60 years. We sugar and have done so for decades. We used to tap out on Town meeting Day. Everybody did. Now many sugar makers are tapping out in January. Yes, it has to do with new technology but it also has to do with significant changes in Vermont temperatures. There is no "normal" anymore. There are extremes of weather brought on by climate change that are worsening. If you have your eyes open and work in the woods at all, you know.

Today only 0.3% of New England forests are older than 150 years. What an opportunity the state of Vermont has to increase that percentage by allowing the trees at Telephone Gap to grow older! What a gift to the children of the future! I can just imagine it.

Thank you for this opportunity to comment. I appreciate it.