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Comments: I am writing to oppose the proposed Telephone Gap logging project.

On Earth Day of 2022, President Biden issued an historic Executive Order directing the US Forest Service to conserve mature and old-growth forests to benefit the climate and biodiversity. On December 29th, the US Forest Service canceled a timber sale in Oregon called "Flat Country" because it violated the intent of President Biden's Executive Order. More recently, the Biden Administration reinstated protections for Alaska's Tongass National Forest, protecting the largest expanses of old-growth forest remaining in the US. Why, then, is the Green Mountain National Forest racing to cut some of the oldest forests in New England?

This project targets 10,855-acres of mature and old forest between 80 & 160 years of age; science has shown that mature stands of trees such as these accumulate and store the most carbon in the fight against climate change compared to young trees. Old forests are exceptional for sequestering and storing vast amounts of carbon, protecting water quality, and mitigating droughts and floods. 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. On the global scale, forest protection represents approximately half or more of the climate change mitigation needed to hold temperature rise to 1.5 degrees Celsius. The largest 1% of trees store 30% of all aboveground forest carbon in the US. Public forests in New England store, on average, 30% more carbon than private forests. We should not be spending our tax dollars 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 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.

Mature and old forests matter for a lot more reasons than the carbon that they store. 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. This area northeast of Rutland, VT is larger in size than the City of Burlington. Such a 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, which prefers mature and old-growth forests for roosting and foraging.

The Telephone Gap project would be a huge mistake in an era when we must do all that is possible to mitigate climate change and prevent species extinction.