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Comments: The Chittenden Planning Commission appreciates the thought and time put into the Telephone Gap Integrated Resource Project's planning process. We know that the people who worked on the landscape analysis and action plan share our deep love of the landscape in this area and want to manage the forest to improve its health and its resilience against the negative impacts of climate change, myriad invasive species, and unauthorized activities and disturbance by human users while also providing local wood products and generating income. We understand that the USFS is trying to balance many competing interests when considering land use and management. That said, given the existential threat that is climate change, we believe that managing the forest as a healthy, resilient landscape should be the key priority in this plan.

We want to acknowledge the year-long public outreach effort by the USFS, with field/site visits plus easy online access to the Pre-scoping and Scoping documentation. The StoryMap that illustrates the project is informative, detailed, and impressive! Thank you for meeting with the Chittenden Planning Commission in August 2022 and presenting the Landscape Assessment at that time. We also appreciate the public information meeting held at Barstow Memorial School in February 2023.

Given that the vast majority of the 34,000 acres of USFS land in this project are located in Chittenden, we as a Planning Commission have some additional observations to share and concerns to relay.

Clearly, this project will impact our town in many ways.

Our major concern is simply the large scope of this project, with nearly 12,000 acres to be impacted by timber management over the next ten years. That is roughly a quarter of the size of our town! Even with the many different silvicultural harvesting methods proposed to achieve the wide variety of outcomes - from improving forest habitats to providing timber resources to increasing recreational opportunities in the GMNF - the fact remains that this proposal impacts a very significant portion of the land in Chittenden. We request that you hone the priorities for this project and focus this work on less than half of the area you've proposed in order to better align with our Town Plan's goal of "Preserving the rural quality of town" and minimize the negative impacts of the project.

The scope of this project leads to additional questions and concerns. For example, a major expense for the Town of Chittenden each year is our roads. In fact, the proposed highway budget for the upcoming year is \$1,022,966.00. The cost of paving alone is skyrocketing. Again, given the large proposed scope of this project, what will the financial impacts be to town roads given the logging equipment and logging trucks accessing the forest?

Additionally, the spine of the Green Mountains creates a bowl, of sorts, from Mount Carmel down the East Creek through the Village Center. We are concerned about a decrease in air quality and an increase in carbon emissions from trucking, more recreational vehicles, and the proposed prescribed burning. What mitigation measures is the USFS planning to minimize these negative impacts?

Among Chittenden Town Plan's goals are the protection of water and soil. We understand this project plans to use herbicide treatment to enhance oak habitat on 348 acres of land. The use of herbicides in the GMNF is potentially damaging to the environment and of serious concern to us. Chittenden residents use ground, well, and brook water as their main water supply. While glyphosate and triclopyr are effective herbicides, their impact on animal and plant species is still being studied and their use reconsidered. At this time, we support manual methods of control over these proposed chemical treatments.

It seems most visitors to Vermont, as well as Vermont residents, are connected to the land via viewscapes. Here in Chittenden, that might be the view of the hillside from the reservoir or the mountain and knolls from their kitchen window. We trust that you will preserve these viewscapes in planning timber management strategies.

Please hear us when we say we all enjoy the recreational opportunities that the GMNF provides and truly appreciate the people who steward this land. We note in the Proposed Action Plan that there are additional miles of trails and several new vistas being added and other vistas to be tended to along the Adirondack and Long Trails. Are there enough additional parking spaces proposed for recreation access? We've observed trucks with bike racks or snowmobile trailers parked on the side of town roads near trail access points constricting traffic flow. There is a proposed mountain bike trail connecting to Stone Hollow Road in Mendon, for example, but no mention of where users' cars will park.

In the past several years, we have also observed ATV/OHVs driving on town roads and into the forest. The deconstruction of Molly Dam will create one more inroad into the forest, given the equipment that will be needed on the project and the temporary access road to do the work. The Plan suggests that measures will be taken to block roads and limit access, yet we've seen that these are often circumvented. We understand there isn't sufficient USFS staffing to monitor and control unauthorized off-road use on all the forest roads. We're wondering how best to address this issue, together.

In conclusion, thank you, Chris, for the many hours you and your team have put into this project. Every time we talk about this project as a Planning Commission we are cognizant of the time and effort put into this Plan. We love Chittenden and everything it provides for us and our visitors. It is our utmost desire to see the land thrive for generations to come.