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Organization:

Title:

Comments: I am a resident of Wonalancet whose property abuts the hiker parking lot access road, which leads to "Springbrook Road 337" in the southwestern area of the project, the entry point for all transportation in this project area. I have grave concerns about the proposed Sandwich Vegetation Management Project for the following reasons.

### 1) Habitat degradation, herbicides and chemical contaminants

Wonalancet is a place of refuge for all species who inhabit the region. The abundant flora and fauna thrives on the health of the watershed and the undisturbed peace of the forest. The meadows abutting the access road are filled with milkweed, which is a necessary habitat for the endangered monarch butterfly. My neighbors and I, including those who are farmers, have taken great pains to preserve the ecological health of the region. I am concerned that the project's stated use of herbicides will pollute the watershed and threaten life in this region.

Like all residents of this area, we have a private well which will be contaminated by pollutants from the herbicides and chemical contaminants from the prescribed burns. The prescribed burns will also contribute to high concentrations of particulate matter in the air we breathe and higher risks of respiratory and cardiovascular disease. My children have had the increasingly-rare privilege of breathing clean air and drinking clean water. If this project goes ahead as planned, the pollution will not be temporary, but permanent, as "forever chemicals" have now been shown to persist indefinitely in the climate and in our bodies.

### 2) Threats to outdoor recreation and the natural beauty of this region

During the Covid pandemic, the Wonalancet trail system was a lifeline to people not only in this region but in the entire northeast. As residents abutting the hiker parking lot, we saw firsthand how many thousands of people came to this region to hike the surrounding mountains. The trails within and abutting the project area (Old Mast Road, the Kelley Trail, the Cabin Trail, the Big Rock Cave trail) will be irredeemably altered by the harvesting and by the road construction. In the winter these trails are cross-country ski trails; they are all-season recreational outlets for residents and the greater public. For the term of the project these trails will be unusable, and for the foreseeable future their beauty and use will be diminished. Having hiked through harvested areas before, I can attest to the diminishment of the experience on numerous levels.

Beyond the recreational aspect there is the visual scenic aspect of the region. As my neighbor Benedict Semmes has compellingly demonstrated in an image showing the cuts in shaded areas (in his comment dated 8/2/23) the iconic view from 113A of the Wonalancet Chapel and Chinook Trail Farm with the backdrop of the forested mountains will be destroyed by the proposed logging. This is a much-appreciated view that people driving through often stop to photograph and admire. The views from the summits of Mt. Chocorua, Mt. Israel, and the surrounding Sandwich Range Wilderness will also be adversely affected.

### 3) Harvesting of mature forest

According to the assessment, 76% of the habitat management area is mature forest. This mature forest is an entire world, a fact that is observable to anyone who sets foot on Old Mast Road or the Kelley Trail. Not only does it support thousands of native species of flora and fauna, it also acts as an immense carbon sink.

Harvesting these mature trees eliminates their current carbon storage and their future value as old-growth forest for very little present economical gain. Furthermore, one of the project's objectives is to establish greater habitat for oak-pine communities; however, this higher value wood also requires more frequent managed burns. The

gains for the USFS are obvious: encouraging less common, but economically higher value species, which then require more frequent fire management and higher value harvesting is good news for the US Department of Agriculture, but bad news for the climate and the health of the planet.