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Tamworth, N.H. 03886

Aug. 28, 2023

Jim Innis, District Ranger

USDA Forest Service Saco River District

33 Kancamagus Highway

Conway, N.H. 03818

Dear Mr. Innis,

I am the owner of "Mt Mexico Farm," a 59-acre property at the northern end of Mt. Mexico Road in Tamworth, New Hampshire. My land is surrounded on three sides by the White Mountain National Forest. Because the property was cleared and the house built in 1848 by the Bickford family, my acreage became "grandfathered" within the National Forest when that was established in 1918.

When the Tamworth real estate agent Sydney Mather first brought my parents up the hill to the Mt. Mexico farmhouse in 1953, they walked around to the front to look at the view. What they saw was a heart-stopping expanse of blue upon blue ridges of the Ossipee Mountains stretching out across the wide southern horizon with the thin silver surface of Lake Ossipee peeking out left of center in the far distance, beyond which even smaller, paler ridges beckoned into infinity.

They told Sydney this was the place they wanted.

"Wouldn't you like to look inside the house?" he asked them.

"That's not necessary," they said

New Hampshire is so full of beautiful views that it has imposed a "view tax" on the luckiest property owners. Tamworth has a large number of beautiful views, for its northern township border runs along the southern border of the White Mountain National Forest. The first ridge of that National Forest is visible to the north and the east of many, many Tamworth properties. The ridge runs from the stately wide profile of Mount Whiteface (4019 ft) in the east over to the iconic Alpine peak of Mt. Chocorua (3480 ft) at the northeast end, with several smaller mountains in between, Mt. Wonolancet, Mt Hedgehog and Mt Paugus among these. From some vantage points in Tamworth, Mt Passaconway (4093 ft) also crops into view behind the other peaks to the north.

It is the forest and the soil of the southern slopes on that treasured ridge that your proposed Forest Service Sandwich Vegetation project would seriously disturb. You have presented us, the public, with a Draft Environmental Impact Assessment in which you or your environmental assessors repeatedly assert there will be "no impact" on the forest from the work proposed for your vegetation project. But you cite virtually no authorities for your "no impact" statement.

It is beyond obvious that your proposed project will have an impact, a profound impact on the Sandwich region of the White Mountain National Forest. Your intent to: eliminate most of the beech stands, to harvest "an estimated 6 million board feet of forest products," to reclear and cut altogether dozens of areas for piling lumber or parking equipment, to restore old logging roads, create also new ones, open skid trails for dragging logs, create 75 clearcuts or clearcuts "with reserves" (whatever that means), work in 130 sections of "two-aged preparatory cut with reserves" proposed along with 65 more of the same but with "Seed Tree" added (meaning presumably seed tree left in place?), do 21 "overstory removal" projects in winter and countless more thinning and and finally patch cut many sections, all these will have a disastrous cumulative effect upon the health, the beauty, the peace and serenity of the forest and the whole ecosystem in each of the three areas where you (the Forest Service) are proposing to work.

And why? Why are you proposing to do this work?

I learn from Inside Climate News (an article from April of this year on a Forest Service logging proposal for Hoosier National Forest) that you have an incentive to do logging in all of our National Forests that has nothing to do with the health of our trees:

"The Forest Service, an arm of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, refers to the nation's forests as 'Lands of Many Uses,' but chief among them is harvesting timber. It sets targets each year for wood production and acreage cut, and employees are evaluated on meeting such goals. Although the amount of timber harvested from national forests has fallen from its peak in the 1980s, Forest Service Chief Randy Moore has told Congress the agency is working toward increasing output by more than one third to 4 billion board feet per year-harvest levels last seen during Bill Clinton's administration."

When I read of such pressures being put on Forest Service employees to come up with timber harvesting yields from the precious national forests entrusted to their care, I feel sorry for your predicament, but I wish that you could have the strength and courage to stand up for our beloved old growth forests against the forces of politics or commerce. And if you balance the interests of finance in Congress against the interests of our community, I think you could make a compelling argument that the economy of New Hampshire would be seriously damaged by your proposed Sandwich Vegetation Management project by causing a severe drop in recreational tourism in the whole region where you are hoping to cut and harvest trees.

The Ferncroft parking lot is the starting point for many trails up Mts Whiteface, Passaconway, Wonolancet, and all connecting ridgelines in between. Your logging plan proposes to send logging trucks up into the forest from that spot. It would disrupt the year-round recreational use of that area most profoundly..

The Forest Service's texts and maps explaining their proposed logging project are unclear and in some places inaccurate, especially the maps. The texts make vague or misleading references to goals ("transportation needs," for example) techniques ("tree girdling," "new growth remediation") which seem deliberately opaque, designed to obscure the true nature of what is proposed in order to shield plan details from the public's specific objections.

Your proposals and your environmental assessment nowhere address the question of herbicides. Do you intend to use them at all in your forest clearing? What is your position on the use of herbicides in the White Mountain National Forest?

Your environmental assessment blithely concludes in every section that your Sandwich Vegetation Project will have "no discernible impact" or effect upon the forest in which you hope to carry it out, but you cite no authority or scientific expert for making this assertion. The assertion seems to me absurd on its face. Every action you list in your proposed plan will have a discernible impact, and I am afraid it will all add up to a disastrously harmful one. Even your proposed controlled burns could prove catastrophic if our local climate returns to summers of partial

drought conditions such as we experienced in 2020 through 2022.

I'm 80 years old now. I love the land around me in all seasons, all weathers. I am lucky enough to be able still to hike and ski the trails all over the slopes you hope to log. One of the local hiking routes, the Bickford Trail, goes right across my land. I love walking it, and I love that all other hikers can walk it, too. But your proposed plan could alter that trail or block its use for more years than I have left.

I love hearing the beautiful trills of wood thrushes all around our house at dusk. Their songs could be stilled or driven away by your intrusion. I love hearing the haunting calls of owls at night. They too could leave our woods, driven out by logging. I love the sunsets over the Ossipees and the bright orange sunrise over our eastern hill. I want others to be able to enjoy all these wonders of our wild and beautiful landscape, not to suffer 5 to 10 years of slashing and burning and logging in our precious ancient woods. These mountains are 400 million years old. They created the woods, and even after the devastating logging before the early 20th century, when New Hampshire and the nation decided to protect them, their majestic trees have grown back again. Please respect the resilience of nature and withdraw your plans for plundering our beautiful old White Mountain National Forest.

Sincerely yours,

Mary Breasted Smyth