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First name: Katharine

Last name: Randall

Organization:

Title:

Comments: Dear Forest Service representatives,

Thank for the opportunity to write to you.

I am writing with concerns about the Sandwich Vegetation Management Project #57392. My nuclear and extended family owns property along Rte 113A that extends to the border of the White Mountain National Forest. The areas that are highlighted are directly behind our home.

This place is sanctuary. It is a wilderness retreat. We love it because it is quiet, it is wild, the forest is beautiful and healthy and OLD. The fact that this area has not been stripped of its biggest trees is a hugely important aspect of living and being here. When I was a child my family, neighbors and predecessors worked long and hard to establish the Sandwich Range Wilderness area.

I am 100% opposed to the proposed plan to enhance the road for lumbering and to log this 650 acres. My ancestor (and the person for whom I am named) Kate Sleeper Walden started the Wonalancet Outdoor Club and brought many people to this area to be in nature. From the late 1800's up to now, thousands of people come here every year precisely because it is so beautiful, untouched, pristine. During the pandemic this area became an even more visible destination for hikers and outdoor enthusiasts, with cars parked all along Ferncroft Road. There is a real value to keeping this area wild, assuring that the trails are well maintained and not logging all the big trees. We need places like this. We need your help protecting it.

My understanding is that under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), federal agencies are required to evaluate the potential environmental impacts of a major federal action. I would like to see a more fully researched and articulated "reasonable range" of alternatives. What is a reasonable range? There must be alternatives. The Sandwich Vegetation Management Project doesn't seem to explore all the possible options. Is this even legal? I request that the White Mountain National Forest provide a detailed No Action Alternative that investigates the benefits of leaving the forest as it is. Leave the trees.

The scenic value of this region is obvious. The southern Sandwich Range is truly stunning. People come from all over the world seeking the mountains, the rivers, the amazing views. Mostly this area provides the opportunity to reconnect with wild nature. The proposed logging will occur along the exact trails that access the Sandwich Range Wilderness and Mt Chocorua Scenic Area. It sounds devastating to walk through clear cuts on the way through this beautiful land. The clearcutting that happened when I was in elementary school was simply horrifying. The scars have remained for my entire lifetime (I am now 58). The proposed areas for logging will be visible from the center of Wonalancet, from the tops of the mountains (is the wreckage from logging really what you want to see after climbing a mountain??) The Wilderness area should be preserved with an area of wildness around it, not a logging disaster area. The whole region is wilderness.

Given the scientific data about the role of these old trees, I argue that the healthy mature forest of this area should be left alone. They store vast amounts of carbon, and they will recover the characteristics of an old-growth forest if allowed to grow older. I request to see the Forest Service provide data on the impact of logging on carbon storage. Logging and burning these carbon-dense forests will immediately release significant amounts of carbon into the atmosphere, worsening the climate crisis. Having lived in CA and witnessed the total devastation of forest fires, why would we voluntarily destroy perfectly healthy forest areas? We need to be working to CONSERVE mature forests just like those targeted for logging in the Sandwich Vegetation Management Project. The Forest Service should be the protector, not the destroyer of these sacred lands. Allow them to grow old!

I am concerned about outdated commercial logging practices that degrade forest health, jeopardize water quality, and endanger biodiversity. I request to see updated practices from the Forest Service addressing destruction practices around logging, road construction, skid trails, and the likely use of herbicides all serve to degrade and fragment habitat for rare and imperiled species that prefer old and interior forests, and risk harming downstream communities. I am especially concerned about the pesticides as we swim in these waters daily. We water our vegetables with this water which means we would be eating these pesticides. There are all sorts federally-endangered species (bats in particular) in this area. I request that the Forest Service do a thorough survey to assess potential impact. The impact on local water quality is a huge red flag, as well as the risk of erosion, flooding and creating an environment that invites invasive plant species. The stuff that grows in the logged out areas is less than desirable.

My understanding is that The White Mountain National Forest last revised its management plan in 2005. That is almost 20 years ago!! We know so much more now. Climate change has changed everything. The scientific consensus on the threat of climate change and its impacts has increased exponentially in the years since. Given that Forest Plans are required by law to be revised after 15 years, I request that the Forest Service revisit and modify its practices to reflect a higher level of awareness, conscientiousness and scientific responsiveness to current conditions. We simply cannot go about business as usual. We must pause, consider new information and make modifications. I request to see a Forest Plan that takes all of the new scientific developments into consideration.

On a very personal note, I have just redirected a huge percentage of my own personal savings to purchasing my cousin's property at 3374 Chinook Trail to keep this land from being developed. I have always spoken with pride and a deep sense of security about having our land border the White Mountain National Forest. For my whole lifetime I have felt that this assured a certain care and safety for this land that is so important to me and my family. Please, do not destroy this land. Protect this area. Take a stand. Take this project off the table. Do the right thing. This is not the place for a logging project. This is a beautiful wilderness sanctuary. This is my home.

Sincerely,

Kate Randall