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Comments: When is enough enough? The United States Forest Service is stripping our beloved natural areas under the guise of proactive forest management.

The Mount Chocoura Region, including Tamworth and Sandwich, is rich in biodiversity. A unique habitat boasting waterfalls, lush hillsides, and crystal lakes is home to thousands of species of plants, animals, and fungi. The abutting national forest adds merit to its classification as pristine wilderness. The wide expanses of mature forest here are no longer found in many places outside of New Hampshire.

The prescribed burns described in the Sandwich Vegetation Management Project outline are reasonable, but the additional damage to our forests is excessive. The entire environmental assessment is littered with financially driven objectives.

By all means, the 306 acres of prescribed fires are important to maintain local safety. The widespread fires have negatively impacted millions and put everyone else on edge. However, the massive portions of land which will be stripped, and then sometimes slashed with wood litter do not lend to this goal. By spending 5-10 years harvesting from this land, the disruption to natural communities will be devastating.

The environmental assessment has not adequately addressed concerns about quality of life, wildlife habitat, and endangered species. Simply stating that "measures will be taken to reduce impact" does not qualify as effectively mitigating the effects. Denying the possibility of a significant impact shows a lack of understanding of the forest by those who approved the assessment. The main issue is not whether the timber cutting will impact local air quality or massive watersheds.

The Sandwich Vegetation Management Project creates large areas of edge habitat by removing the core of mature forests. This results in fragmented habitats where the conditions change enough that native species are forced to move further into the forest. Even with a 66-meter buffer around endangered species, the negative impact of the Sandwich Vegetation Management cannot be negated.

As listed in the environmental assessment, the project aims to create wildlife habitat, even though it involves destroying existing habitat. Each access road, timber station, and form of exploitation has a notable impact. The project's justification would require a substantial reduction in the amount land designated for producing high-quality timber products. The worth of this land to the community and local wildlife outweighs its timber value.