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Organization:

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Comments:

Smyth

Mary Breasted

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Tamworth, N.H. 03886

Oct. 11, 2023

Jim Innes, District Ranger
USDA Forest Service Saco River District
33 Kancamagus Highway
Conway, N.H. 03818

Dear Ranger Innes,

Once again I want to express my serious concern about the Sandwich Vegetation Management Project put forward for our area of the White Mountain National Forest. As I stated earlier, I am a property owner in Tamworth, NH with land that is surrounded by National Forest on three sides. I care deeply about the state of our local National Forest, both as a resident and as a user of the trails and woodland landscape contained within it.

Over the last two months, you and other Forest Service representatives have exhaustively outlined the details of the Sandwich Project, showing concerned local residents maps of the intended logging patches and controlled burns with some indications also of new and old forest roads necessary for your proposed work. I have listened carefully and am still opposed to your proposal.

My chief reason is that climate change and global warming have so escalated in the last five years as to make previous Forest Service logging goals and systems seem woefully obsolete. Nowhere in your plan have you or the other foresters shown a willingness to make adjustments to your logging proposal to take into account this urgent problem. When we raised with you the President's Executive Order 14072 which calls for the preservation of "mature trees" and "old growth forests" in specific response to the urgent need to combat climate change and preserve carbon capture, you and your colleagues responded that your superiors in the Forest Service have given you no guidance or new rules connected to or stemming from the President's order. This is most unfortunate, and I can see how it might stymie your team's potential efforts to take climate change into account in your work.

But inaction from the Forest Service's top executives does not make the climate change issue any less relevant to our concern for the health and recreational importance of the Sandwich Range in the White Mountain National Forest. Why is it not possible to reconsider the basic premises of your plan now, as it was first conceived in 2005 when climate change seemed a far less urgent problem?

And beyond the problem of climate change, the economy of New Hampshire is also relevant to the Sandwich Vegetation Management Proposal because the area targeted for your work is one of the most popular in the entire state for hikers and skiers. Having logging trucks pull in and out of the Ferncroft trailhead parking lot and potentially occupy half of its most sought-after space for weeks on end would be a huge deterrent to recreational use of the area as would all the logging machinery, refuse, skid trails and traffic on woods roads.

You have educated us well on the purpose of the Forest Service: number one, to produce timber. Forest management as defined by your team is management to produce a healthy timber crop. That is not necessarily the same thing as a healthy old growth forest. I am hoping that by the end of our discussions about the pros and cons of the Sandwich Vegetation Management Proposal, the goals and priorities of the Forest Service will have been altered so that carbon capture and combating climate change/global warming top the list and timber production is moved down.

Once again, I believe the Sandwich Vegetation Management Project will, if implemented unmodified from its current form, have a profoundly harmful effect upon the environmental health of the Sandwich Range south-facing slope, on its beauty, its soil, water quality, wildlife habitats, erosion potential, air quality, carbon sequestration and recreational use.

I thank you for your patient hours of trying to reassure our community about the impacts of the proposal. With warm respect for you and your team's knowledge and sincerity, I remain firmly convinced that the Sandwich Vegetation Management Project is not a good plan for our precious White Mountain National Forest. It offers no help against our most urgent environmental problem, catastrophic climate change and global warming. Indeed, it promises to add to the catastrophe.

Grateful for your attention and hoping for a new plan,

Mary Breasted Smyth