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Comments: In my previous comment expressing opposition to The Sandwich Vegetation Management Plan, I indicated that the Forest Service should consider stepping back from proceeding full tilt with its current timber harvest plans and embrace a more passive management approach. Proforestation as it is known, is a climate mitigation course of action that seeks to strengthen and sustain complexity and carbon accumulation in forest ecosystems. Due to the great uncertainty of future climate change effects that appear so concerning to ourselves, our children's futures, and their children's futures, it is an imperative that is deeply felt by many at this point in time. And based on the large volume of public responses that were generated over the last two comment periods about the Sandwich Vegetation Management Project, there appears to be a groundswell of support for a much lighter touch when it comes to forest management. After this year's recent collective experience of the warmest winter ever seen in New Hampshire, I am more convinced than ever that implementation of this project in its full scope should be reconsidered.

Indeed the Forest Service openly addresses the vulnerability that may exist within the White Mountain National Forest due to the potential impact of climate change in its recently released Forest Carbon Assessment Report. One such scenario depicted the possible impact of widespread soil evaporation due to increased temperatures and reduced rainfall that could ultimately lead to reduced growth rates and negative carbon sequestration within the forest, and possibly exacerbated even further when drought-stressed trees become more susceptible to insect infestation and other pathogens. The trend that we are all seeing now in New Hampshire, however, appears to be more a scenario of warmer temperatures but greater rainfall. Fortunately for the forests (and us), both of these changing climate conditions are naturally mitigated within old-growth and mature forests with their great capacity to absorb and store moisture. It would seem to me that harvesting timber through thinning, clear cutting, prescribed burning, and creating vehicle access roads into logging sites would be a significant contributor to either increased desiccation, or in the case of increased rainfall, greater runoff and erosion from these heavily disturbed areas.

On a more encouraging note, included in the FS Assessment Report was the FS's commitment to the future protection of all national forest system lands to keep the forests always as forests with the goal of maintaining all NFS lands as a buffer to non-forest conversions by other land use imperatives such as housing and commercial development projects (pg.25 Forest Carbon assessment for the White Mountains). And happily due to Executive Order 14072, the FS has been mapping old-growth and mature growth forests, and now prohibits timber harvesting in old growth forests, the most ecologically diverse forests that account for the most carbon storage of any other forest type. Next to old-growth forests in terms of structural complexity and carbon accumulation are the mature forests.

Unfortunately, the Sandwich Range Vegetation Management Plan still includes timber harvesting in these essential pre-old-growth stands. And all indications suggest a continuing 40- 60 year cycle of timber harvesting in many of these same regions in the future. That is why I believe this plan ultimately falls short. In their stated mission to "sustain the health, diversity, and productivity of the Nation's forests and grasslands to meet the needs of present and future generations", the FS is still incentivized to see productivity in terms of a marketable crop of board feet of timber. Not at all surprising given that the entire world has long had a tremendous need for wood, and still does. However, it's my belief that our national forests should be seen, appreciated, and protected for the much more purposeful (and productive) role that they serve: as one of our nation's most fortunate treasures - living landscapes of old-growth, mature forests, regenerating young forests, all existing as patchworks of wildness that span the entire country in the various regions of their unique climate niches. As natural repositories that are capable of storing vast amounts of carbon, they are also home to many rare and often unseen organisms, many still undiscovered, all alive in a complex system of ecological balance attained over hundreds of

years. Let us all value and protect this precious resource now and into the future.

Thank you,
Andrew Thompson