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Comments: I write to implore the Forest Service to choose Alternative A; No Action (or as close as possible) in the matter of the proposed Telephone Gap project. I counsel ecological silviculture only, with minimal, if any, commercial objective.

We are at a tipping point, regionally and globally. What has become clear in the last few years, informed by the IPCC 6th Assessment Report, Vermont's 30 x 30 act, the July 2023 Vermont flood, new research on carbon sequestration, the youth mental health crisis, and the biodiversity crisis, is that incremental improvements to our traditional ways will not be sufficient to restore New England to a place where it can support modernity sustainably over decades and centuries.

The Telephone Gap watershed drains ultimately into Lake Champlain and the Gulf of St. Lawrence, as well as into the Connecticut River and Long Island Sound, underscoring the global nature of this decision and why we must break from business as usual and accelerate the healing of the forest ecosystem at every chance that we have. This is one of those chances.

We have made laudable, incremental progress ecologically, economically, and ethically in recent years, and the February 2024 revised proposal and preliminary environmental assessment reflects much expertise and reflection on the part of the Forest Service, as well as a manifest desire to incorporate the input from hundreds of citizens. But as UK prime minister David Lloyd George wrote a century ago, "Don't be afraid to take a big step if one is indicated. You can't cross a chasm in two small jumps."

And that big step, in this case, may be to take the smallest step possible. Indeed, as some recent studies have pointed out, sometimes doing "nothing" may be preferable in the long run to anticipatory, preemptive, salvage, or commercial silviculture. And with forest ecosystems, it is the long run that matters.

Thank you,

Charles J Houston III