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Comments: Dear Mr. Ibarguen,

I am writing to express my deep concern and formal objection to the Sandwich Vegetation Management Project as detailed in the draft decision notice provided by the Saco Ranger District. My objection specifically centers on the adverse impacts this project poses to hiking, outdoor recreation, and the intrinsic value of natural experiences in the Sandwich Habitat Management Unit in Carroll County, New Hampshire.

The Sandwich Vegetation Management Project, encompassing approximately 638 acres of National Forest System lands, aims to diversify vegetation and enhance wildlife habitat. While these objectives are commendable, the project overlooks the critical importance of these lands for recreational use, particularly hiking, which is a significant activity in the area. The following points highlight the basis of my objection:

****1. Disruption to Trail Experience:**** The project's execution, involving timber harvesting and transportation system alterations, risks significantly disrupting the natural beauty and tranquility that hikers seek. The aesthetic degradation and noise associated with these activities could diminish the quality of the recreational experience, potentially for years to come.

****2. Access Limitations:**** Management actions may necessitate temporary or permanent closures of existing trails or access points. Such closures would not only inconvenience hikers and outdoor enthusiasts but could also lead to increased pressure on other nearby natural areas, potentially causing overuse and environmental degradation in those locations.

****3. Long-Term Impacts on Trail Systems:**** The project's focus on timber production and habitat diversification must not overlook the potential long-term impacts on the trail systems. Changes in vegetation and landscape could alter drainage patterns and soil stability, affecting trail maintenance and safety.

****4. Insufficient Consideration of Recreational Values:**** The documentation available seems to inadequately assess the full value of the affected area for recreation. Hiking, birdwatching, and nature study are vital activities that contribute to the physical and mental well-being of New Hampshire's residents and visitors. The project must more thoroughly evaluate and mitigate impacts on these recreational opportunities.

In light of these concerns, I urge the USDA Forest Service to reconsider the current plans for the Sandwich Vegetation Management Project. It is imperative to conduct a more detailed analysis of the project's impact on recreation and hiking, incorporating strategies to minimize disruptions and preserve the area's natural beauty and accessibility for outdoor enthusiasts. Alternative approaches that more closely align with the preservation of recreational values, while still achieving project objectives, should be explored and prioritized.

Thank you for considering my objection. I strongly advocate for a balanced approach that safeguards our cherished outdoor recreational spaces while pursuing conservation and management goals. I am eager to see a revised project plan that fully recognizes and protects the recreational importance of the Sandwich Habitat Management Unit.