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Comments: I am writing in support of Alternative B for the following reasons:

Homogeneity-The project area is comprised of homogeneous stands of similar age and structure. Such conditions do not offer the diversity of age classes, species, and structure necessary to encourage and maximize biodiversity within the project area.

Young & Old Forest-In their "VT Conservation Design", the VT Department of Fish & Wildlife has identified young forests (forests from 0-20 years old in blocks of at least 5 acres) and old forests (forests which are biologically mature, generally with trees exceeding 150 years in age) as highest priority features for maintaining an ecologically functional landscape. The proposed Alternative B supports the State's goals for both of these features by:

1) Creating 892 acres of young forest which is approximately 2.5% of the acreage within the project area owned by the GMNF.

2) No cutting is proposed on 77% of the project area owned by GMNF and of this, 12,554 acres (35% of the GMNF owned portion of the project area) have been designated as unsuitable for timber management, making them off limits to cutting in the future.

Carbon-Climate change has highlighted the importance that our forests play in mitigating the impacts of climate change. Our forests play two very important roles in climate mitigation as they both pull carbon from the atmosphere through sequestration as well as store that carbon in their cells. Both of these activities are equally important, and both are maximized under different conditions. Young forests sequester more carbon from the atmosphere while old forests store more carbon. As a result, it is important to maintain a healthy balance of age classes, species and structural diversity on the landscape in order to maximize the effectiveness of our forests to mitigate climate change. Alternative B will create much needed diversification in age classes in line with the goals established by the State of Vermont as well as sets aside areas which will be allowed to mature naturally to further develop old forest characteristics.

Resiliency-As our climate continue to change and new stresses are placed on them due to exotic pests and invasive species, forests will need to be able to adapt to these new stresses. The planned activities in Alternative B will increase the forest's resilience to these unprecedented stressors by; diversifying the age structure and species composition, active promotion of oak and the completion of assisted migration through plantings of species which are better suited to warmer conditions, and the control of invasive plants where they exist.

Support of Rural Communities-A vibrant forest economy is disproportionately important to rural communities who depend on the working landscape to support them and their ways of life. The actions planned in Alternative B support the working landscape and the communities which depend on them. Reduced harvesting in any capacity threatens to negatively impact the regional forest economy which in turn makes it harder to economically complete sustainable forestry on all lands in the region, not just within the project area.

Thank you,

Seth Clifford