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First name: Roaming

Last name: Wabanaki

Organization:

Title:

Comments: Kwai Kwai,

I am writing to request that the Department of Interior Bureau of Indian Affairs reach out to the U.S. Forest Service and provide them with direction and guidance on the matter of respecting and implementing the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP). Members of Vermont's four Abenaki communities and a significant population of relocated Indigenous diaspora tribal members are requesting an opportunity to have meaningful input on a U.S. Forest Service proposal to log 12,000 acres of National Forest land, the Telephone Gap Forest area. This section of the National Forest contains rare old growth tree stands and Indigenous cultural sites.

Unlike our counterparts in the Midwest, Southwest, Pacific Northwest, and Canadian First Nations, we Indigenous Peoples of the Northeast USA have been on the receiving end of colonial dispossession for a centuries-longer time exposure. Few of us have been able to hold onto our homelands or to maintain any continual and intimate connection with place because we typically do not have reservations. Consequently, for many of us, protected unspoiled natural places such as National Forests are our only opportunity to experience Mother Earth as our ancestors did. National Forests where there are significant areas untrammled by human activity, and especially areas undisturbed by de-forestation, where our other-than-human kin thrive, they are our sanctuaries, places where we can engage in ceremony and personal communion with vestiges of a once vast continent of unspoiled nature.

When the Forest Service proposes to turn protected areas, and old growth forests in particular, into wood products, not only are we denied our sanctuary, but our other-than-human living kin are displaced or exterminated. So much is written about the intergenerational trauma associated with Indian Residential schools. I know it well as my grandfather spent most of his youth in three of these schools and that experience haunts me. Facing the possibility of our natural sanctuaries (National Forests) being subject to a clear-cut haircut, is all too familiar. It is trauma for Indigenous people. As it is, by the way, for many in the mainstream.

I am writing to request your intervention in our request to pause the decision-making process on the US Forest Service's Telephone Gap timbering plan in Vermont until the US Government provides for meaningful engagement ("full, prior, informed consent" and consultation) with Indigenous Peoples as required under the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and as requested in the attached petition. The current deadline for comment is April 8, 2024. We are requesting an extension of the comment period so that we may participate meaningfully.

Wliwni,

Roaming