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Comments: In this time of wild weather patterns clearly influenced by human induced climate change, there's never been a more important time to protect our forests!

I write to express my deep concern regarding the Telephone Gap Integrated Resource Project planned for the Green Mountain National Forest. As someone who values our natural heritage and understands the critical role forests play in climate regulation and biodiversity preservation, I urge you to reconsider the proposed activities, especially timber harvesting.

Forests like those in the Telephone Gap area are not just trees; they are complex ecosystems that provide invaluable services. The project area, encompassing towns like Chittenden, Killington, and others, is a vital part of our ecological and community fabric. It's been noted that the project aims to enhance wildlife habitat, forest health, and recreation, among other goals. However, the potential cost to mature and old forests, which are scarce and irreplaceable, is too great a risk.

Recent studies underscore the unmatched capability of mature forests to sequester carbon, far beyond that of younger woodlands. Mature trees, some over 120 years old, are not merely standing timber but are active participants in carbon capture, helping to mitigate the accelerating pace of climate change. In Vermont, these ancient woodlands are exceedingly rare, making their conservation all the more critical.

The proposed timber harvesting, even with modifications and alternative plans, could lead to irreversible loss of these ecosystems. The removal of large swaths of mature forest for timber contradicts the urgent need to preserve our natural carbon sinks in the face of a changing climate. Moreover, the ecological integrity and biodiversity these forests support cannot be replaced or replicated through managed reforestation or timber plantations.

In light of this, I implore you to prioritize the long-term ecological and climate benefits of conserving mature forests over short-term economic gains from timber. Let us not sacrifice these irreplaceable treasures for transient benefits. I stand with many in our community in seeking a future where conservation and respect for our natural world guide our actions.

Thank you for considering this perspective.