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Title:

Comments: Hello, I am writing today to weigh in on the management of this public forest. The Telephone Gap Forest is more than just a collection of trees; it represents the natural resources that have sustained our lives and my families livelihoods for generations. The thought of losing this maturing forest and forest like it is heartbreaking. We've always understood the importance of a thoughtful, respectful relationship with the landscape, and it's our responsibility to be good stewards of this place we call home.

Losing the Telephone Gap Forest would have a profound impact-not just on the land itself, but on the species that depend on it, like the northern long-eared bat and, potentially, the Canada lynx. Healthy, connected habitats are critical for increasing biodiversity and building resilience against climate change.

I'm particularly concerned about the old-growth characteristics of the forest-ancient ecosystems that have taken centuries to develop and cannot be replaced. These forests provide critical benefits, from storing carbon and supporting diverse wildlife to anchoring the identity and well-being of our community.

The decision to clear-cut the Telephone Gap Forest is also in direct conflict with President Biden's executive order aimed at protecting mature and old-growth forests as part of the nation's climate strategy. This federal directive recognizes the irreplaceable value of these forests in sequestering carbon, enhancing biodiversity, and building resilience against climate change. The outdated management plan that allows for large-scale logging in the Telephone Gap Forest fails to align with these modern conservation priorities. Instead of prioritizing short-term economic gains, we should be following a science-based approach that values the long-term benefits of preserving mature forests for their ecological, cultural, and climate-stabilizing roles. By protecting the Telephone Gap Forest, Vermont can lead by example in supporting the goals of this important federal initiative and safeguarding the natural resources that define our region's identity.

Furthermore, it is common knowledge by now that a timber cut of the scale would have devastating negative effects on the Otter Creek watershed, which is a vital resource for both the environment and the communities it supports. Forests play a crucial role in regulating water quality and quantity by filtering pollutants, reducing soil erosion, and maintaining consistent streamflows. We all know this now and it is not debatable that removing large sections of forest destabilizes soils, leading to sedimentation in waterways, which can harm aquatic ecosystems and disrupt habitats for fish and other species. Increased runoff from clear-cut areas can also carry pollutants like fertilizers and chemicals into streams and rivers, further degrading water quality. Moreover, forests act as natural sponges, slowing down and absorbing rainfall. Without this protective canopy, stormwater surges directly into waterways, increasing the risk of flooding downstream and threatening farms, homes, and infrastructure. Protecting this forest is essential to preserving the health and resilience of the Otter Creek watershed for future generations.

This isn't just about environmental preservation; it's about honoring a legacy of responsible land stewardship that has defined Vermonters for generations following our colonial mistakes of the past. Groups like Standing Trees Vermont and 350VT are right to stand up for the Telephone Gap Forest, and I urge decision-makers to prioritize the long-term health of this land and the people, plants, and animals that depend on it.

Vermont has a proud history of valuing its natural landscapes and leading by example in environmental stewardship. Protecting the Telephone Gap Forest is an opportunity for our state to reaffirm its commitment to these values and set a powerful precedent for others to follow. By choosing conservation over destruction, Vermont can demonstrate how thoughtful management of our natural resources benefits not just our ecosystems, but also our communities and future generations. Let's show the nation what it means to be leaders in protecting

biodiversity, combating climate change, and preserving the forests that sustain life. Now is the time for Vermont and its leaders to rise to the occasion, defend the Telephone Gap Forest, and ensure that this incredible natural resource continues to inspire and sustain for generations to come.

Thank you for taking the time to read my comment.

Peter Heartwood,

Ripton, VT