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Comments: I am writing this comment based on new information that has emerged since initial project scoping took place in 2023. I have always been concerned that the Forest Service is not only understaffed, but is also unable to update its planning documents. That is no doubt due to resource challenges. I do not agree with extending documents beyond their reasonable lifespan, because that leads to a growing gap between realities on the ground and the outdated data and models used in the 2006 Forest Plan. Keeping information fresh is always challenging.

The new development is that the Forest Service expects to hire no field staff or seasonals or whatever terminology will be used for the 2025 field season / growing season. This is per the Chief of the agency in September, 2024. That is a huge problem, specifically regarding the monitoring of projects and collection of field data. Without that information, the adaptive management planning model suffers greatly as does work with communities and partners.

I am alarmed that the agency would attempt to implement additional projects knowing that staff will be short in the near term. I'll guess that staffing and funding may be a problem for many years. If such is the case, I ask that the agency step back and address the shortfall. How will capacity for projects be maintained? How will vigilance for invasive species, erosion issues, and all other site-specific issues continue and carry forward? Current remediation and mitigation and follow-thru on projects is already inadequate. I believe this is a conversation that must happen; it must happen soon and address upcoming / pending projects, ongoing projects, and communities that may be "interested and affected."

Without a thoughtful, participatory plan, developed in collaboration with Vermonters who express interest, the ability to carry out projects seems impaired. Vermonters do not need more process clutter regarding their resource worlds, but this feels vitally important. There is little margin for error with projects like Telephone Gap when the startpoint science is already aging out. Please engage communities soon on this issue.

Thank you.