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Comments: In addition to our ongoing overall cultural heritage and lifeways consultations with the Green Mountain National Forest, which necessarily includes the Telephone Gap project area, we would like to specifically reaffirm our strong position that Old Growth and Mature Forest be left completely wild (hands-off) and self-sustaining. These are highly culturally-significant Places that provide not only biological, watershed, connectivity, and carbon-sequestering benefits but also maintain cultural and spiritual reserves, a baseline reference that is almost non-existent elsewhere for Indigenous Land relationships. These high and remote places have functioned in this capacity for thousands of years and these publicly held lands are a last vestige that deserves full protection on behalf of All of Our Relations. We have shared this position publicly in National-scale USFS Indigenous work sessions conducted by the USDA Tribal Relations office. We are happy to discuss this in greater detail as we continue our tribal consultations. This position also aligns directly with new Federal commitments to incorporating tribal perspectives as held within TK/TEK.

Further, we feel strongly that commercial logging in public lands including National Forests needs to stop completely, for many of the same climate-change-informed reasons. This can no longer be economically and scientifically justified, given the very small percentage of total timber production and management that occurs within public forests (less than 1%) in the State of Vermont. This is the best place to start implementing the sequestration priorities made clear in Executive Order 14072. This also works in tandem with the State of Vermont's goals in Act 59 (2023), "An act relating to community resilience and biodiversity protection."