

Data Submitted (UTC 11): 1/17/2025 9:01:37 PM

First name: Leo

Last name: Zhelnin

Organization:

Title:

Comments: January 16, 2025

USDA - Forest Service, Rochester Ranger District c/o Christopher Mattrick 99 Ranger Road
Rochester, VT 05767

To: Christopher Mattrick - District Ranger,

I am writing to express my continuous strong opposition and to the proposed Telephone Gap Integrated Resource project. It should be noted that I provided scoping comments with my initial letter dated March 13, 2023 and another comment letter on April 7, 2024. My concern and objections continue to be focused on Timber Management and Recreation.

Timber Management

Even though the Forest Service made some changes to the initially proposed plan by selecting Alternative C, these adjustments fail to address public concerns. The areas slated for logging under the TGIRP include concentrations of mature and late-successional trees aged 80 to 160 years. These old trees are rare and invaluable!

As a resident of Goshen-located within a portion of the proposed project area-I and my wife set out last spring on a mission to explore and witness firsthand what is at stake in Goshen Township. Our goal was to reach a section of the forest with trees dating back to 1899 (Compartment 110, Stand 20). For about an hour, we wandered through the forest, which looked very similar to the woods around my Goshen house that used to be a sheep farm sixty years ago, consulting the TGIRP harvest map and my phone. After crossing a few swampy areas and climbing a ridge, we found ourselves in a very different forest. Suddenly, we didn't need navigation anymore-we knew I had arrived.

The scene reminded me of the first time I walked into a cathedral. The soft sunlight filtering through the young canopy resembled the glow of light streaming through stained glass. The towering trunks of old trees soared upward like Gothic pillars, while the chirping birds filled the air with a sound akin to the murmurs of human visitors. Underfoot, instead of tiles, the ground was carpeted with vibrant spring vegetation. Though I'm not a botanist, I couldn't help but marvel at the incredible diversity of plants beneath my feet.

Standing in this remote old forest, I was filled with a profound sense of calm and peace, as if touched by a divine presence. Unfortunately, I quickly noticed the trees marked with blue spray paint-a mark of their impending destruction. In the midst of a mental health crisis, it is unacceptable to destroy these oases of peace, beauty, and healing. I urge the Forest Service to cancel the TGIRP. Our children and grandchildren will thank you for preserving these forests for future generations to enjoy.

In addition to my previously submitted comments, I am providing the following objections based on new information that has become available since the preliminary environmental assessment comment period began on March 8, 2024.

The Telephone Gap area is home to extremely rare species, including the Canada Lynx. A security camera captured a lynx walking through the parking lot of the GMNF Supervisor's Office in Mendon, VT on September 3rd. And yet, despite proof of the presence of Lynx in the Telephone Gap project area, the Forest Service stated in the Telephone Gap Biological Evaluation that "the gray wolf and Canada lynx are not known to occur within the

project area on the GMNF, [and] they are not likely to occur within the project area in the foreseeable future." This is false. The Forest Service must reassess and analyze the potential impacts on lynx.

The Telephone Gap logging project would cut 817 stand acres of old growth, a significant figure considering that the US Forest Service estimated in June that there are only 2,000-acres of old-growth in the 400,000-acre Green Mountain National Forest. In other words, only 0.5% of the entire forest is old growth, and the Telephone Gap project threatens to cut almost half of this extraordinarily important and rare habitat. Research indicates that New England's forests could store two to four times more carbon if allowed to grow old. Preserving these mature trees is one of the most impactful actions Vermonters can take to fight climate change.

The Telephone Gap project would release 254,556 tons of CO₂e-equivalent to driving more than 60,000 average passenger vehicles for an entire year! Tax dollars should not be used to subsidize tree cutting, which directly contributes to increased CO₂ levels.

In conclusion, the proposed TGIRP alternative C doesn't align with the FS's mission: "Caring for the Land and Serving People" therefore TGIRP should not be implemented. The FS should make the only right decision- abandon the project.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit an objection to the proposed Telephone Gap Integrated Resource Project

Respectfully,

Leo Zhelnin
Goshen, VT
Green Mountain Forest