

Data Submitted (UTC 11): 1/18/2025 3:20:06 AM

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Comments: As someone who moved to Vermont decades ago during the wave of people seeking a simpler, more sustainable way of life, I've come to deeply love and respect this land and all it provides. Vermont's forests, like the Telephone Gap Forest, are treasures that deserve our care and protection. I'm writing today to urge the Forest Service to reconsider the proposed timber harvest in this critical area, which so many Vermonters, myself included, strongly oppose.

The Telephone Gap Forest is a mature forest, essential for wildlife habitat, carbon sequestration, and water quality. It's one of Vermont's best opportunities to allow a forest to grow into an old-growth ecosystem, which we desperately need for biodiversity and climate resilience. By protecting it, we give future generations a chance to experience the kind of forests that once covered this state-forests that support a rich diversity of life and serve as natural solutions to climate change.

This is public land, and the public has made its voice clear: we want this forest to remain standing, intact, and healthy. During the public comment periods, there has been overwhelming opposition to this management plan. The Forest Service is charged with managing this land on behalf of the people, and it is your duty to listen. Logging this forest would not only devastate the landscape but also betray the trust Vermonters have placed in your agency.

The proposed harvest is also outdated and at odds with the direction we need to take. President Biden's executive order to protect mature and old-growth forests recognizes the importance of these ecosystems in fighting climate change and preserving biodiversity. Continuing with this plan would be a step backward when bold climate action is urgently needed.

Moreover, clear-cutting this forest would harm the Otter Creek watershed, impacting water quality and increasing the risk of erosion and flooding downstream. This watershed is vital to both the ecosystem and the communities it supports. Destroying it for short-term economic gain is shortsighted and irresponsible.

Vermont has long been a leader in environmental stewardship, and we have the chance to set an example for the nation by protecting Telephone Gap Forest. Let's make Vermont a model of conservation and climate resilience. I urge the Forest Service to align its actions with the values of Vermonters and the demands of our time: preserve this forest, protect its biodiversity, and honor the public's voice.

This isn't just about saving trees; it's about safeguarding our shared future. Thank you for considering the overwhelming public support for conserving the Telephone Gap Forest. It's time to prioritize long-term stewardship over short-term profits.