

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE - Dec 4, 2024**

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**VNRC, Audubon Vermont, and Dr. William Keeton Applaud Adoption of Innovative Approach to Forest Management in Telephone Gap**

*Montpelier* – Today, the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) issued its final decision on the Telephone Gap Integrated Resource Project in the Green Mountain National Forest (GMNF). The plan adopts an innovative approach to national forest management that can serve as a model for national forests.

“We are pleased the Forest Service has protected old growth stands and included our recommendations to create a national model for how to balance diverse management goals and implement ecological forestry to advance old forest conditions on national forests,” said **Jamey Fidel, Forest and Wildlife Program Director with Vermont Natural Resources Council.**

“We commend the Forest Service for adopting a forward-thinking forest management plan that sets a powerful precedent—a model for national forests across the country to follow,” said **Jillian Liner, Interim Executive Director at Audubon Vermont.** “This plan supports multiple uses while addressing the diverse needs of people, wildlife, and the environment.”

“Forests that are made up of a variety of ages of trees, complex structure, and a diversity of species are critical to supporting a wide range of birds, many of which are experiencing significant population declines. Vermont’s landscape, dominated by middle-aged and relatively simple forests, needs this diversity restored in order for birds and other wildlife to thrive. This plan takes meaningful steps toward addressing that need, ensuring a healthier and more

resilient forest ecosystem for the future,” said **Tim Duclos, Forest Program Senior Associate at Audubon Vermont.**

“The plan selected by the Forest Service sets a new precedent for ecologically-oriented forest conservation and management. It protects all the remaining old-growth forests in the project area; uses ecological forestry practices on thousands of acres of middle aged forests to restore more old forest conditions; and – appropriately -- allocates some middle aged forests to a variety of other uses. This is exactly the kind of holistic model we need for old forest conservation and restoration on public lands. National forests around the country are likely to follow suit, and this was a real win in terms of public comment dramatically moving the needle,” said **Dr. William Keeton, Professor of Forestry at the University of Vermont.**

*For additional background:*

On December 3, 2024 the U.S. Forest Service issued its final decision on the Telephone Gap Integrated Resource Project in the Green Mountain National Forest (GMNF). The final decision can be found [here](#).

The Forest Service’s original proposal for the project, which covers a project area of 72,250 acres, would have harvested close to 12,000 acres, including areas that had old forest conditions and characteristics. During the public comment period, Vermont Natural Resources Council, Audubon Vermont, and Dr. William Keeton with the University of Vermont submitted detailed comments encouraging the Forest Service to develop one or more alternatives to better promote ecological forestry and diverse management goals while protecting and expanding late-successional/old-growth forest characteristics.

We dedicated significant time, resources, and expertise to research and evaluate potential alternatives and their impact on forest health, carbon sequestration and storage, watershed health, wildlife habitat, ecosystem services, and economic and recreational opportunities. As part of our work, we engaged Dr. William Keeton, an expert on forest carbon management, ecologically-based silvicultural systems, old-growth forests, and sustainable forest management policy to help us provide recommendations to the Forest Service.

Based on an initial review of the final decision, we are pleased that our recommendations for

implementing climate smart practices related to conserving and promoting late successional and old growth forests were incorporated into the Forest Service's final decision. More specifically, our recommendations proposed a completely new model approach for (1) protecting existing old-growth stands, (2) supporting retention and active restoration and recruitment of additional old growth forests, and (3) promoting ecological forestry management practices on the GMNF, in addition to implementing water quality protection measures. As a result of our recommendations and input from the public, the Forest Service set aside 661 acres due to their old forest characteristics, reduced the overall harvesting to less than 7,743 acres, and will now practice ecological forestry on 3,611 acres through methods that will enhance late successional and old forest conditions.

Our understanding is that the Green Mountain National Forest is one of the first national forests in the country to operationalize such an approach on the heels of national directives by the Biden Administration for old forest conservation and restoration that are still being finalized, but which we anticipate will be eliminated or weakened by the incoming Trump Administration. Because of this threat, it is critical that we make progress on new national forest management approaches here in Vermont, and we are heartened that our detailed advocacy resulted in tangible results before any backsliding occurs on national forest policy.

You can read our recommendations to the Forest Service [here](#).