

VERMONT WOODLANDS ASSOCIATION POSITION STATEMENT

Green Mountain National Forest Wilderness and Special Areas

POSITION

The Vermont Woodlands Association (VWA) supports the Forest Plan Revision process underway on the Green Mountain National Forest (GMNF). Forest Plan Revision should be permitted to proceed to a conclusion without being pre-empted by legislation forcing new wilderness or special area designations at this time.

BACKGROUND

Multiple use is a guiding principle of VWA, and it has the wide-spread support of Vermonters-at-large. The GMNF has been managed for multiple use since the purchase of the first national forest lands in Vermont in 1932. Multiple use assures that no single use, be it preservation or timber harvest, will predominate. Instead, a balance of uses will be maintained so as to serve the greatest number of users for the long term.

Congressionally-designated wildernesses exclude many other uses of the national forest such as timber management, motorized recreation, construction of campgrounds, and mechanical clearing of wildlife openings. Trees cannot be thinned, cut or pruned to control insects and disease or reduce wildfire risk, thereby raising concerns that either pests or fire hazard will build-up and spread to nearby private lands. Search and rescue in wilderness areas is impeded due to prohibition of motorized equipment and vehicles. Designated wilderness and other special areas promote waste of valuable and renewable timber resources by prohibiting scientific management which would generate needed wood products, jobs and a boost to local economies. Private woodland owners are likewise adversely affected because there are fewer loggers, truckers and sawmills left in business to process timber on small, privately-owned properties.

Demand for forest products will continue to grow as world population expands. Already, forests in developing countries are being cut at an unsustainable rate to supply our needs. Given our forest management knowledge and capability, we should strive to provide as much of our own country's timber and fiber needs from America's public and private forests as possible. Active management of both should work in concert. New methods of timber harvest, pest control, fuels management and other techniques first developed, applied and studied on the GMNF, can then lead to improved management on thousands of private ownerships such as those represented by VWA members.

An untouched forest offers limited biological diversity and poor habitat for many wildlife and bird species which require forest openings and the lush variety of life they provide. Early-successional habitat is already in deficit, according to the GMNF and other independent studies, contributing to population decline of a number of dependent species such as rabbits, hares, ruffed grouse and many neo-tropical migrant birds. Active forest management is the primary means to restoring and maintaining a balance of age classes and a truly diverse habitat for the majority of species.

CONCLUSION

For these reasons, VWA urges that no new wilderness areas, national recreation areas or national conservation areas be enacted while revision of the GMNF Forest Plan is underway, and thereafter only after compelling biological and scientific evidence is presented. We request that the Vermont Congressional Delegation refrain from sponsoring any legislation to expand or create any of these areas on the GMNF at this time.