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Ours is a land of many uses

It has been argued for decades that responsible timber operations benefit the health of the forests. Environmental groups have argued the opposite. It is still true today.

Friday, a federal judge rejected an attempt by the New Hampshire Sierra Club to put a halt to two logging operations in the White Mountain National Forest. The Sierra Club, the Wilderness Society and the Center for Biological Diversity want the operations halted while they prepare an appeal. It came down to wanting the judge to intervene while the groups succeeded in making the logging operations unprofitable through delay.

Judge Steven McAuliffe didn't buy into the environmental groups' claim of "irreparable injury."

McAuliffe issued an order in June rejecting claims the logging plan was not adequately reviewed by the U.S. Forest Service and others. He ruled the mere existence of potential harm to the environment does not mean the certainty of irreparable injury.

No certainty of irreparable harm, no cause for intervention. If the courts were to step in every time an environmental group from somewhere in the United States argued potential harm, there wouldn't be a stick of timber cut in the United States.

Our forests are for the use of everyone. The White Mountain National Forest is a splendid example of it. The national forest provides a wonderland of recreational opportunity 12 months of every year. It is a source of wealth for the people who live and work in the region — wealth shared by other regions of the state.

Our forests provide a variety of private- and public-sector jobs for thousands of our residents.

The management of New Hampshire's forests is an important function of the U.S. Forest Service, the state and responsible private groups. In the past several decades, the people of New Hampshire have become sensitive to their environment. Apolitical, but socially conscious residents of New Hampshire have given of their time and efforts to conserve and preserve the land on which they live. Conservation commissions have come into being in cities and towns throughout the state.

New Hampshire is the second-most forested state in the nation, second only to neighboring Maine. A survey conducted in 1997 showed 84 percent of New Hampshire's land area was forested and 94 percent of that — more than 4.5 million acres — was classified as timberland and "is physically capable of growing timber crops and is potentially available for harvesting."

The mass of forested land in New Hampshire declined in the years leading up to 1997, and in that year was forested at a level that existed in 1948. But three-fourths of the decline occurred in the southern part of the state, where population growth was greatest. Communities in southern New Hampshire since have become aware of the effect of that growth and are beginning to deal with it.

Forest industries and well-managed logging operations in the national forest and other timberland areas of the state will benefit the people of New Hampshire — their environment, their economy and their way of life.

The people of New Hampshire, working with responsible conservation groups and organizations focused on New Hampshire's environment, will preserve their way of life and ensure the continued best use of their forested lands.

The White Mountain National Forest is not something to be looked at from afar. It is not something we fear to touch. It is a treasure with which we have been entrusted by nature, and people wiser than those who would encase it behind a posted fence with a sign that reads: "Do Not Touch."
