

Vermont Group's Forest Service Appeal Denied

By TOM MITCHELL Staff Writer - Published: March 9, 2009

RICHMOND — The U.S. Forest Service has denied an appeal by some conservation groups intended to halt logging and road construction in the remote Kilkenny Roadless area north of Mount Washington in the White Mountain National Forest.

The appeal, filed in early January by the Center for Biological Diversity and Sierra Club in Vermont and New Hampshire, opposed the Mill Brook Project near Stark, N.H. The project's timber sale would cut wilderness trees in a protected area in northern New Hampshire.

An issue in the case, is a national rule, enacted during the Clinton administration, which mandated the protection of national forest roadless areas nationwide, Mollie Matteson, a conservation advocate at the Center for Biological Diversity said recently.

Besides intruding in a roadless area, in a way that appears to violate federal law, the timber sale will degrade habitat crucial for rare and wide-ranging species, Matteson said. Among those likely to be stressed by climate change are Canada lynx and American martin, Matteson said.

"Once more, officials at the White Mountain National Forest prove... how out of touch they are with both conservation science and the desires of the American people," Matteson said. Protection for national forest roadless areas has gained popular support, in New England and nationwide, Matteson said. "How long is this agency going to keep its head in the sand?" Besides roadless area protection, a key issue that has been raised in the conservationists' appeal, has been the need to consider the climate change implications stemming from clearcutting and other logging techniques, Matteson said.

"There is mounting evidence that climate change is... having an effect on New England's wildlife and forests," Matteson said.

"Species are shifting their ranges; some are just disappearing from places they used to be," she said. The Kilkenny area is one of the bigger and most isolated roadless tracts of the east, where moose are more common than hikers, Matteson said.

Cutting trees, "especially the big, old ones that characterize roadless areas," tends to release carbon dioxide adding to greenhouse gases, Matteson said.

"Disturbing precious wildlife habitat in roadless areas and simultaneously adding to greenhouse gas emissions makes... no sense," she said.

Meanwhile, the U.S. Forest Service has already begun logging in two other roadless areas on WMNF: the Wild River roadless area near Jackson, N.H. and the South Carr Mountain roadless area near Warren, N.H., Matteson said.

Before and after photos show once tree covered and lushly vegetated areas have been

turned into barren stripped over areas.

Late last year, the U.S. Forest Service finalized a decision to log in a fourth roadless area, known as Sandwich 4. It is located next to the Kancamagus National Scenic Byway and the Sandwich Range Wilderness.

Federal foresters have indicated that virtually all future timber sales on the national forest will include cutting in roadless areas, Matteson said.

For example, the Caribou area, in western Maine, is among those likely to be targeted soon, she said.

Foresters working on White Mountain National Forest project appear to be operating using on outdated timber cutting goals without an awareness of new environmental impacts, Matteson said.

"(They) are not able to see the national significance of protecting our last remaining roadless lands," Matteson said.

The actions of federal managers of the White Mountain National Forest has illustrated why the protections of the roadless rule were established in the first place, Matteson said.