

Forest Service plans timber sale

Staff Report

RICHMOND — The U.S. Forest Service decided this past week to hold a fifth timber sale in a roadless area of White Mountain National Forest in New Hampshire, continuing a policy opposed by the Center for Biological Diversity in Vermont.

The Stevens Brook timber sale would log 157 acres in the South Carr Mountain roadless area, a project near Warren, N.H., that would clearcut 43 acres, according to representatives of the environmental group in Vermont.

"The White Mountain National Forest is fixated on logging roadless areas in defiance of conservation science and the public will," Mollie Matteson, conservation advocate for the Center for Biological Diversity, said recently.

Last year, the center opposed the Forest Service plan due to the rarity and high ecological values of intact roadless areas, impacts on global warming and the need to protect forest species stressed by a changing climate, Matteson said. She also cited cumulative impacts of the project on bat populations.

"Roadless areas are critical ecological havens in an era of

global warming," Matteson said. "Plans to clearcut them demonstrate very acutely the need for strong, nationally consistent protection for all roadless areas."

The latest plan emerges as the Obama administration is being urged to take a "time out" on logging in all national forest roadless areas, until Congress and the courts can sort out contradictory policies and judicial decisions.

"The Forest Service is in desperate need of leadership from the Obama administration," Matteson said. "These new clearcuts will be on their watch."

She referred to a May 7 editorial in the New York Times called on President Obama to follow through on his past support for roadless areas. The center has posted a video of clear cutting last fall in the South Carr Mountain roadless area on its Web site.

In a setback for environmentalists earlier this year, the 1st U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals denied a legal challenge that environmental groups brought to try to stop logging the Than Brook project on up to 930-acres in the White Mountains.

It includes the Wild River inventoried roadless area, where up to 51-acres would be clearcut on

380-acres near Jackson, N.H. The court also rejected an appeal by conservationists of the Batchelder project where federal foresters intend to cut on at least 108 acres of the South Carr Mountain roadless area where cutting has begun. It includes clearcutting on 32 acres, according to the court decision.

The federal appeals court in Concord, N.H., ruled that arguments the groups filed against the projects were too general to be considered effective. They rejected Sierra Club's arguments that the court stop timber cutting in the national forest because it would likely bring harm to key watersheds, and irreversibly alter traits of the roadless areas.

Acknowledging likely adverse impacts to soils and streams, federal foresters concluded that the project would likely not significantly alter the overall character of the area's logged.

That's partly because cutting will be limited to areas where minimal road systems will be used, court officials said. As a result, there should be no lasting effect on the roadless character of the area, federal forest officials said.

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