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## Chris Matera: A wake-up call for Vermont's public forests

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By Chris Matera

The Vermont Agency of Natural Resources (ANR), the same agency dragging its feet on cleaning up Lake Champlain, is now brazenly planning to more than triple the logging of the public forests surrounding Vermont's iconic Camel's Hump mountain.

Buried in a new proposal by ANR to manage the state owned public forests around Camel's Hump is a plan to radically increase logging on these forests when compared to the previous 25 years. As everyone knows, much of this land area is too high or steep or otherwise impossible to log, and the plan itself says that 8,500 acres are suitable for logging. The intention is to log 3,800 of these 8,500 acres, or 44 percent, in the next 15 years. Overall, the plan increases the cut on these forests from 18 timber sales (1,745 acres) over the previous 25 years, to 34 timber sales (3,800 acres) in the new 15 year cycle, a 263-percent increase.

The public has certainly not been clamoring for more cutting of their public forests, so why the drastic increase? Who benefits? Always follow the money, as they say, but this is more complicated than it appears. Many of the proposed 34 timber sales over the next 15 years are likely to be "below cost" when all costs are accounted for, meaning the public picks up many of the costs of these timber sales, which benefits the private companies doing the cutting. The public costs are often greater than the income from the sale, meaning that the public effectively pays to cut down their own forests.

This plan has nothing to do with "helping" the forest, or wildlife, or the environment, quite the contrary, it is aggressive, commercial logging and a grab for the public treasure masquerading as concern for the environment.

Despite the specious claims otherwise by vested interests, there is no "need" to log these public forests and many reasons not to. Logging damages the forest ecology, it does not "help" the forest as often claimed by those who stand to benefit by cutting it. We may choose to cut private forests for wood and money, but we should not kid ourselves that we are doing the forest any favors.

The forests that surround Vermont's iconic Camel's Hump have a much higher calling than being chopped and chipped for the benefit of a handful of private interests. These public forests literally make life possible (even pleasurable) for all 600,000 Vermonters by providing clean air and water, wilderness, undisturbed wildlife habitat, fisheries protection, scenic beauty, recreational opportunities, and importantly today, carbon sequestration.

If Vermont is sincere about doing its part to reduce global warming, it could start putting its words into action by halting the counterproductive practice of commercial logging on the 8 percent of Vermont forests owned by the state. This would increase the carbon sequestration by Vermont's forests to help offset its own (understated) emissions.

It is also more than a little disturbing, and raises concerns for the management of other state forests, to see ANR (the agency supposedly in charge of protecting Vermont's public resources) promoting the archaic worldview that considers public forests productive only if they are logged, even though logging them will degrade all of the other critical forest functions. ANR is also misleading the public by regurgitating manipulative industry talking points used to justify aggressive logging, and falsely claiming that the logging is being done to "help" nature. For example, in perfect Orwellian fashion, we are no longer cutting the forest, we are now "treating" the forest.

Finally, if you care about the public forests surrounding Camel's Hump, and all Vermont public forests, please let yourself be heard before this raid on the public forest treasure becomes the law of the land. Now that there is finally a tiny bit of press about the issue, two of the three public meetings on the plan have already happened, but one remains, scheduled for November 29 from 6-8 p.m. in Crossett Brook Middle School, Duxbury. ANR is also accepting written comments at ANR.Camel'sHump@Vermont.gov.

*Chris Matera is a registered civil engineer in Vermont and founder of Massachusetts Forest Watch, a citizens group formed to protect New England public forests.*

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