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Subject: Comments on Public Hearing on Reclassification of Blue Bank Brook in Ripton
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My name is Karen Jeffers. I jointly own with my sister, Ellen Forshaw, two parcels of land that will be affected by the reclassification of Blue Bank Brook. The two parcels of land are 128 acres and 84 acres in size. Blue Bank Brook flows through both.

These parcels of land were bought by my great-grandfather, Lewis Chatfield, in the 1870s. The 128-acre parcel was bought to create a homestead, to farm and for as a lumber lot. The 84-acre parcel was always used solely as a lumber lot. Until the 1960s, the only access to these parcels was by roads maintained by my great-grandfather or his son, my grandfather Daniel Chatfield. We have records in Lewis's diary of the hours he spent maintaining the roads. In the 1960s, a forest service road was built and my grandfather was forced to allow it to bisect both lots.

Lewis hand-built a house and started raising a family. When Lewis's family grew to six children, he bought land with a bigger house just over the town line in Lincoln, but kept his Ripton lots. He continued to hay and garden the meadows around his old house – meadows he had created by cutting trees. Lewis started our family history of using these parcels as managed woodlots. He knew that the trees were a renewable resource that could sustain income over the years. When my grandfather turned to dairy farming, he still hired lumbermen to cut the trees in a managed harvest. My grandmother continued doing this after his death. My mother, in turn, continued after my grandmother's death. My sister and I both plan to continue with the managed harvest of the trees.

When my great-grandfather died, he willed the two lots in Ripton to his two unmarried daughters. This was to provide for their upkeep. My great-grandfather did not will any of the land or money to his three married daughters. Because the unmarried daughters lived across the street from my grandfather and he provided for them, my great-grandfather's arrangement kept the land undivided until the Green National Forest forced the spinsters to sell about 20 acres due to the "Chatfield Lap." After the death of one sister, the other sister sold the land to my grandfather because he had cared for her. My sister and I do not currently intend to subdivide the land. We plan to leave it jointly to our children.

When I was about five years old, I went with my grandfather and father from the Lincoln farm to the Ripton lots. We could drive to Spruce Lodge, the then end of the road for automobiles, but had to walk the rest of the way. The walk to the Old Place, the 129-acre parcel where my grandfather was born and lived his early childhood, was fairly easy since my grandfather maintained the primitive road in order to get his farm wagon back to the meadows. However, when we continued on to the Natural Turnpike lot (the 84-acre parcel) the path became rough since we were then following a partially overgrown logging road. The memory of seeing the Natural Turnpike, a glacial formation, as it was then has stayed in my mind for over sixty years. It had steep banks that rose to a very level top that was the width of a road. It looked as if someone had started to build a road in the middle of nowhere. Unfortunately, when the forest road was constructed some years later, it was built atop the Natural Turnpike. The Turnpike is no longer as impressive as it was before the road was built. Furthermore, when the forest road was built, the Forest Service changed the characteristics of Blue Bank Brook, channelizing it alongside the road for about 1000 feet. Although beavers had always infested the Old Place, the change in the brook at the Natural Turnpike made that location attractive to them, as well.

Just as the Natural Turnpike has changed, the characteristics of the Old Place have changed over the years. In the late 1960s, my grandparents would take me to Ripton to pay the taxes. On the return trip, we would stop at the Old Place for a picnic beside the brook. At that time, the meadows extended from the brook to the cellar hole of Lewis' house, which is very close to the current forest service road. (Several decades before, my grandfather moved the house itself to the Lincoln farm and recycled it as a sugar house.) After the picnic, my grandfather and I would walk across the meadows from the brook to the cellar hole. My grandfather stopped farming when he turned eighty years old. Brush, and eventually trees, started taking over the meadows. Although the meadows are no longer there, my family knows that the trees provide a different source of monetary value to us. When they are cut, they will grow again, providing value for future generations.

Although my parents lived near Schenectady, New York, and I have lived in many states including my current state of Massachusetts, I have spent some time in Vermont every year of my life. When my husband and I were married in December of 1977, we honeymooned at the farm. In subsequent years, we vacationed there. When my daughters were born, we took them to the farm frequently. My younger daughter, in particular, enjoyed rambling over the mountains. When she was tragically killed, we scattered some of her ashes on the land she so loved.

I wrote the above information so you could understand just how much this land means to both my sister and me. However, as much as we love to walk over the land and enjoy the nature displayed there, we also know that the land is a managed woodlot and contains valuable timber. The current timber is a result of a growth after my ancestors cut previous trees. In turn, we will be harvesting the timber. But we know it will grow back.

I learned about this proposed stream reclassification only because my sister received a notice and called me. My name is listed on Ripton's Grand List along with my sister's, but no notice was sent to me. Neither of us knew anything about this before late February of 2021. Unfortunately, due to travel restrictions imposed by Vermont because of COVID, we could not access the information we have at the farm, nor could we research on-site. However, we have been able to do some research online. I discovered that, on June 13, 2016, a final petition was submitted to reclassify the streams within the Green Mountain National Forest to A(1). In it, a mention was made of landowner concerns. Those landowner concerns were lightly dismissed. But it is the landowners who have the most significant interest in the project. I am concerned that we will encounter problems when we harvest our wood, vis a vis both the lumber we will be permitted to harvest and the harvesting conditions. I have talked to lumber companies who also expressed similar concerns. I fear my concerns about use of the land will be as lightly dismissed as those of the property owners potentially affected by the Green Mountain National Forest proposal.

Vermont's wetland regulations mention beaver problems vis a vis silviculture and address these problems at least somewhat, but the A(1) regulations do not. The requirements for A(1) streams mention "natural conditions" several times. What are "natural conditions?" Are they before or after beavers? Are they before or after the forest service road changed the brook?

How will the "natural conditions" regulation affect our lumber harvesting? On both parcels, we have to cross Blue Bank Brook to reach sections of our land. Will we be required to limit timber harvesting near the brook? If the "natural conditions" apply to the tributaries, most of our land is affected. In either case, we give up value, but receive nothing in return. It seems to me that this taking of our trees contravenes the portion of the United States Constitution fifth amendment prohibiting the government from taking

private property without just compensation.

Managed forests can promote both flora and fauna. A well-managed timber cut can mimic natural events such as blowdown and fires. This leads to diverse habitats, which support a wide variety of animals and plants. Selective cutting can eliminate unhealthy trees allowing the remaining trees to grow strong. When we think of cutting trees, we often think of the trees being turned into lumber, paper, and other such products. But the unhealthy and deformed trees can be used too, for instance as biomass. In Vermont, biomass from trees is used to produce electricity by both Middlebury College and the McNeil Generating Station in Burlington. By managing the forest and keeping it strong, the waters running through them are kept healthy.

I would like to conclude with some more information about me. I went to college, then worked as an environmental engineer partly because my grandfather and father taught me to love nature. All my life, I have retained the principles they taught me. I was composting and recycling long before it became fashionable. Here in Massachusetts, my husband and I live in an area which was once heavily wooded. My neighbors cut their trees so they could have large lawns. But we didn't. The trees on our lot shade what little grass we have. It is never a lush green. However, because we don't use fertilizers or water the lawn, it is able to withstand times of drought. We drive small cars that are very fuel efficient. We keep them until they fall apart; one is currently over twenty years old. We have led many free canoeing/kayaking trips for the Merrimack Valley Watershed Association. We have also volunteered many hours to teach children about the environment. The environment has, and always will be, important to me.

Since the proposed reclassification of Blue Bank Brook affects our land very directly and the DEC's own testing shows that my family has been good stewards, I don't see any reason why the reclassification needs to be done. I strongly oppose this petition.

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