Dear Mayor Macksey, 9.29.24 (full letter)

I am writing to you out of deep concern for the planned logging of the environmentally sensitive forests in the Notch Reservoir forests. I am a retired Senior Land Use and Natural Resources Planner at the Franklin Regional Council of Governments where I worked on numerous community planning projects throughout Franklin County focused on environmental resilience, watershed health, and climate change. I have a Master’s Degree in Sustainable Landscape Design from the Conway School. In the many natural resource-related projects I have worked on over the years, community involvement and robust science have been essential to their success.

I have been closely following the Notch Reservoir logging controversy that has been unfolding in North Adams. As a former FRCOG employee, I witnessed the creation of the Mohawk Trail Woodland Partnership (MTWP), which originated as a project in the FRCOG planning department in which I worked. I saw firsthand that the MTWP was not really a grass-roots effort, but was instead imposed on our agency with targeted funding from the Baker Administration. I directly witnessed the manipulation of the public process at community meetings, where outcomes such as prioritizing logging were predetermined, even though the public wanted to prioritize forest protection. Eventually the MTWP became so controversial for the FRCOG that the FRCOG stepped away from the organization, after which it was taken over by the New England Forestry Foundation (NEFF). Although the MTWP has tried to distance itself from its early efforts to site wood processing facilities and promote logging in the region - and are now promoting themselves as forest preservationists - they are still very much pursuing logging projects regardless of the environmental costs to the communities with whom they have engaged.

I hope you will be very careful about what you think you are being sold by the MTWP. As I have watched this entity operate, it has become clear to me that it functions through what appears to be deceptive marketing, painting a rosy picture for the public of "logging for the climate”, a concept that is not supported by science. Meanwhile, behind the scenes, the entity is implementing an agenda focused on the logging of mature forests. The MTWP seems to be primarily functioning as a funding mechanism for receiving state and federal grants, most of which are meant to enrich the coffers of Mass Audubon and NEFF, as well as to provide subsidies to loggers for cutting down valuable public trees for sale on the international timber market. This timber market is worth billions of dollars annually but provides little or no benefit – and often environmental degradation - to the local communities who agree to sell their trees for what ends up being a pittance.

I encourage you to take a close look at the way the City of North Adams is being manipulated by outside groups, such as NEFF and Audubon. I believe you are being told one thing, while the opposite is true. From what I have learned, the process that has led to the decision to log in the Notch Reservoir forest has been highly flawed and has avoided engaging the public. Instead of providing benefits for the climate as claimed, logging in this area will degrade water quality, increase erosion and sedimentation and will introduce invasive species in this environmentally sensitive and important ecosystem. Wide skid roads and industrial-scale logging equipment will decimate the landscape, killing all plant and animal species in their paths. Clearly these outcomes are opposed by many of your community members who are making their opposition known to you.

I implore you to place this ill-advised logging project on hold and to conduct a legitimate public planning process that includes community involvement, and utilizes robust science instead of false promises of benefits for the climate.  I hope that North Adams will engage in a transparent process when it considers the fate of the Notch Reservoir forests and along the Bellows Pipe Trail. If it is your decision to permanently degrade a beloved hiking trail of national significance and imperil the health of your public drinking water supply by logging forests in the Notch, I hope you make that decision with full involvement from the community that you have sworn to serve.

Sincerely,

Mary Chicoine

Greenfield, MA

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