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30 July, 2001

Judith Reardon  
Friends of the Sandwich Range  
PO Box 350  
Chocorua, NH 03817

Dear Judith,

Thank you for your letter of 20 June, 2001, regarding the proposed extension of the Sandwich Range Wilderness in the White Mountain National Forest. We appreciate the opportunity to comment on the proposal, and hope that your work will inform decisions on the White Mountain National Forest Plan Revision.

The Nature Conservancy's mission is to protect the plants, animals, and natural communities that represent the diversity of life on earth by protecting the lands and waters they need to survive. Our process for identifying high priority lands and waters includes systematic analyses of known rare species and exemplary natural communities, as well as identification of large, relatively unfragmented forest "matrix" blocks. Matrix blocks contain viable examples of the dominant forest community types that cover the majority of the landscape, and are bounded by major roads and other significant fragmenting features. The Conservancy has prioritized for conservation those blocks that are sufficiently large and ecologically intact to serve as effective coarse filters for capturing representative small patch natural communities (e.g., alpine zones, cove forests, and bogs), to provide suitable habitat for forest interior, wide ranging and migratory wildlife, and to be able to withstand large-scale, infrequent natural disturbances (such as hurricanes, ice storms, and gypsy moth outbreaks).

We have employed this approach—called Ecoregional Planning—throughout the Northern Appalachians/Boreal Forest Ecoregion and have identified a forest matrix block similar to the proposed Wilderness Area extension. The Nature Conservancy's next step is to initiate site conservation planning, which requires a more thorough, site based analysis of conservation priorities within areas identified during Ecoregional Planning.

As we have not undertaken site conservation planning for the Sandwich Range area, we have limited information on which to base an ecological assessment on the Friends of Sandwich Range proposed Wilderness Extensions. We can offer strong support for many of the key ecological concepts that form the basis of your proposal, including: 1) greater representation of lower elevation areas in our wilderness network; 2) inclusion of fragile and untrammled sub-alpine communities and other important natural habitats, particularly any occurrences of rare species or exemplary natural community documented by the New Hampshire Natural Heritage Inventory; 3) connecting wilderness and scenic areas; and 4) improving ecological linkages between wilderness areas. In general, The Nature Conservancy supports conservation of large,

landscape-scale forested areas that capture a broad range of wildlife habitats and natural communities at a scale that reflects key ecological and evolutionary processes, and we commend your conservation efforts. Wilderness Areas within the White Mountain National Forest represent some of New Hampshire's most outstanding opportunities to provide for biodiversity conservation at meaningful and enduring scales. Our conservation planning efforts will benefit greatly from the kind of work already completed by Friends of the Sandwich Range, and we hope to work with you more in the future.

Thank you again for the opportunity to comment on your proposal, and please do not hesitate to call with questions or comments.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Peter Benson".

**Peter Benson**  
Northern NH Program Manager