

Zoar needs credible forest management

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Is NYS Department of Environmental Conservation's Zoar Valley logging plan credible forest management? Let's examine some facts.

Failure to disclose or involve the general public in the specific logging proposal and site planning is not professional forest management. The Audubon logging plan of 2021 does not provide site-specific information critical to interpret its merits.

What are the scope and intensity of the logging proposal? What logging methods are to be employed? What are the environmental impacts of additional logging roads, skid-trails and other disturbances?

What is the monetary value of the proposed logging operation? These elements must be disclosed.

The proposal is to impact 92 acres — maybe up to 1,000 — of mature, old-growth forest in Zoar Valley, with "overall health," improved habitat and rare bird species, as justifications for the project.

Old-growth, mature forests are critical habitats that already harbor rare, threatened or endangered species of birds, mammals, reptiles, amphibians, invertebrate species and plants.

Species inventory surveys are required on the 92-acre site to identify the species that are already using the old-growth, mature forest. Only with current, total species inventory can a project be evaluated as beneficial or detrimental. What unique, micro-habitat features are present in the tract that provide diversity? Without these current surveys, any action is premature. That is not professional forest management.

To propose logging these mature, old-growth tracts to provide "habitat" for scrub-shrub avian species means their elimination. Old-growth forest habitats and scrub-shrub habitats are not mutually exclusive; each habitat type is beneficial and does not prevent or exclude the other. Proper forest management will provide both habitat types without logging rare, mature old-growth tracts.

Opening the forest canopy by cutting mature forest is a neon sign for the introduction of exotic, invasive plant and animal species. Destruction of wooded wetlands or other diverse, microhabitats through the logging operation reduces diversity, rather than enhances it.

All of these considerations need unbiased evaluation and public scrutiny. Anything short of these levels of analysis is not professional forest management and calls into question the true motivations behind the project.

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