

January 22, 2026

Trevor Hahka, District Ranger
Bessemer and Watersmeet-Iron River Ranger Districts
E23979 US Highway 2 East
Watersmeet, Michigan 49969
Trevor.hahka@usda.gov
comments-eastern-ottawa@usda.gov

Dear District Ranger Hahka,

We, the undersigned, urge you to use your authority as the Responsible Official for the Silver Branch Vegetation Management Project, to modify the project boundary to protect current and proposed wilderness areas in the Ottawa National Forest and to conduct a full Environmental Impact Statement.

As you know, the Silver Branch logging project is the Ottawa's largest in at least a quarter century, covering almost 128,000 acres or about 200 square miles, and proposes extensive clear-cut and selection-cut logging across a project area that extends for about 40 miles from the northern border of the Sturgeon River Gorge Wilderness Area south to U.S. 2 near Iron River.

We have serious concerns about the project's likely harm to the mature trees that characterize much of these lands, fragmentation of wildlife habitat, and increased risk of runoff and invasive species infestation from the proposal to build 13 miles of new roads and rebuild 466 miles of existing roads in the national forest.

The logging project also could degrade the neighboring Sturgeon River Gorge Wilderness and would harvest the aspen, paper birch, and northern hardwoods that cover Keep the U.P. Wild's 2,000-acre proposed addition to the gorge.

Residents of Michigan's Western Upper Peninsula and visitors alike highly value the project area in the Ottawa National Forest for its scenic beauty, vast conifer and hardwood forest, abundant hunting and fishing opportunities, and popular hiking access, including in the Sturgeon River Gorge Wilderness and along segments of the North Country National Scenic Trail.

Protecting these lands would help fight fragmentation and climate change and promote biodiversity in an area suitable for gray wolf habitat and known for its Northern long-eared bat population and several populations of rare plants and bolster the Western U.P.'s multimillion-dollar outdoor recreation and tourism economy.

Given the scale of the Silver Branch project, which encompasses more than one-eighth of the entire national forest and about one-quarter of all its public lands deemed suitable for commercial logging, the potential environmental impacts cited above, and the 30-year implementation period, we ask that the Ottawa National Forest to exclude from the project any lands adjoining existing wilderness or proposed for wilderness protection and conduct a full Environmental Impact Statement.

Sincerely, the undersigned organizations and businesses:

Bryan Mitchell Photography

Cafe Bodega

Flow Water Advocates

Great Lakes Great Responsibility Foundation

Groundwork Center for Resilient Communities

Haight's Wanderings Guide Service

Houghton County Democratic Party

Keweenaw Coffee Works

Laughing Whitefish Bird Alliance

MAWBY

Michigan Audubon Society

Michigan Chapter of the Soil and Water

Conservation Society

National Wolfwatcher Coalition

Newaygo Brewing Company LLC

Northern Michigan Environmental Action

Council

Shepherds of the Wilderness

Stewards of Kleinstuck

Student Biodome Project

Temple Kol Ami Social Action Committee

Trails North

Wisconsin Forest Conservation Task Force