**RE: Foothills Landscape Project 1/3/20**

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on the proposed management of the Chattahoochee National Forest. The Ruffed Grouse Society (RGS) fully supports the proposed Alternative 2. Incorporating conditional management for this project is both responsible and logical given the scope, identified needs and anticipated time frame for project implimentation. Integrated ecological landscape restoration is designed to aide in the recovery of degraded, damaged or destroyed ecosystems. Upon reviewing the exisiting conditions (table 3) the Foothills landscape is appropriately catergorized as in need of ecological restoration. The major cause in poor ecosystems quality is through fire suppression and lack of forest management. Reversing and healing an ecosystem requires the dedication and committement from those charged with the stewardship responsibility and support from all forest users.

This area currently has some of the wildest characteristics within the Southern Appalachians and is unique as an important urban interface for forest users. The qualities that draw visitors for multiple activities are the same qualities that are in danger of being lost without addressing the ecological issues. Many users cannot differentiate between the green lie and healthy forest vegetation. It becomes the task of the USFS and other stakeholders to provide that guidance. If management actions do not get implimented to improve the biologic integrety of the landscape, ecosystem services currently being provided to the local communities and users will be jeoprodized. It is also concievable that services would be enhanced as some opportunites for recreation and wildlife encounters currently are deminished or non-existent due to the condition and structure of the landscape presently.

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Identifying not only the lack of young forest habitat from an age-class perspective but for the overall lack of vertical structural diversity within the Foothills landscape as a need is appreciated. Vertical structure is critical for many species of resident and migratory songbirds. Birds utilize multiple age-classes and structure throughout their lifecycle. The tools used for the creation of quality vertical structure will vary depending on the silviculutral needs of the stand. Good silviculture is good wildlife management. Having the flexibility (multiple tools) to respond to unforseen weather events, potential insect and disease conditions and general stand dynamics is the most efficient method to achieve the desired restoration outcome.

Creating young forest habitat by managing the abundant mature forest stands rather than a continual disturbance regime in previously managed stands confirms the understanding of this structure type as dynamic rather than static. The previously managed stands (pole) are intended to progress towards late successional stage and should be managed for forest health and composition through maturation. Understanding the fluidity of a forest and the need for rotating disturbance to ensure old growth qualities and young forest structure will

be forever present for future generations is a concept difficult for many members of the public to comprehend. The forest cannot be treated like a lawn. Repeated stand initiation most times is eliminating a structural componet in greatest need or the at the least the best that is currently available.

I do disagree with prohibiting management in view from trails or along trails. Without some management there will come a time that the forest, either through succession, falls apart, or through other natural influences becomes degraded. Manage to conserve the traits of the corridors through prevention of disease or elimination of forest pests where/when needed is warranted. Not managing vegitation is also making the decision of limiting the wildife encouters for trail users. I would suggest to have at the least spur trails leading to some of the timber management units with observation decks and kiosks. It is acceptable to manage roadside overlooks with timber harvests so folks can see but not acceptable to manage with timber harvest to ensure the view will be forested for future generations. This is the public perception we as managers and conservationists need to continue to work to overcome.

With the recent article publised in Science from the researchers at the Cornell Lab of Ornithology on the number of birds lost, the natural resource manganement community should use this research as support for vegetative management. Making a decision to not manage our public lands is making a concious decsion to not conserve a whole suite of species and lessening the opportunity for wildlife experiences available to the public and future generations.

This proposal is an effort to create and enhance forest health, reliencey and sustainable wildlife populations within a landscape during some lifecycle stage. Using all the tools available and integrating disciplines to meet desired outcomes is a daunting undertaking. Conditional management is a relatively new concept for many members of the public to understand. This type of management has the opportunity to keep stakeholders and users of the forest continually engaged throughout the life of the project more than the traditional design. Restricting natural resource managers to using a prescription that concievably is not ecologically sound for the stand condtions at time of implementation is not responsible and should /would be unacceptable. This proposal is designed to prevent this and afford the natural resource managers the opportunity to achieve the desired outcome from a silviculture, wildlife and overall ecosystem services aspect.

Feel free to contact me regarding any of the information above. I look forward to staying engaged throughout the remainder of this process and implimentation.

Professionally



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