

REQUEST FOR A WAYNE NATIONAL FOREST BACKCOUNTRY AREA

March 20, 2020

Wayne National Forest
Supervisor's Office
c/o Forest Plan Revision Team
13700 US Highway 33
Nelsonville, OH 45764

Re: Forest Plan Revision — Backcountry Conditions, Trends, and Request

Dear Wayne National Forest Plan Revision Team,

We request the creation of a named Backcountry Area in the northern tier of the Wayne National Forest's Athens Unit. The Backcountry we envision is an extensive and remote space managed for wildlife carrying capacity, impressive pre-settlement aesthetics, and non-mechanized recreation like hiking, hunting, backpacking, horseback riding, and camping. Opening a named Backcountry Area here will stimulate the region's economy, serve unmet demand for deep woods recreation, and enhance the Wayne's relevance and status as a destination.

The named Backcountry Area we seek is located in the heart of the Athens Unit's hiking and horse riding trails. It includes the Wildcat Hollow trail network, and it spans the rugged and scenic Buckeye Trail/North Country Trail sections (and proposed reroute) from Burr Oak State Park in the east through the Old Stone Church area in the west. The Backcountry would unite the Athens Unit's non-mechanized trail areas by replacing the current Athens Unit FSM, FOF, and DCF management areas north of State Routes 93, 216, and 685 (Baileys parcel(s) excluded).

This is a region of small communities with rich historical legacies and charm — communities that are poised to benefit from a growing outdoor recreation economy (\$24.3 billion annually in Ohio alone). Rural counties with large amounts of protected federal land (Wilderness, National Monuments, National Parks, etc.) enjoy jobs growth at more than double the rate of rural counties whose federal lands are largely unprotected. A named Backcountry Area here would attract tourism dollars, feed a strong local entrepreneurial spirit, and grow incomes and property values — all while protecting and celebrating local heritage.

Our members, constituents, and patrons are hungry for access to quality deep woods recreation. Although Ohio has forestland, it has very few old, expansive forests where visitors can immerse themselves in awe-inspiring grandeur. 77% of Ohio's forestland is located within a quarter mile of roadway. Less than 0.4% of forest stands in Ohio are more than 140 years-old. These challenges are part of what makes the Backcountry Area we propose so compelling. This Area contains six roadless parcels in excess of 1,000 acres. And, it harbors some of the Wayne's largest and oldest trees. Protecting this Area will preserve its intact and roadless qualities and allow for the recovery of impressive natural features.

We seek a Backcountry managed for historic and old-growth attributes, including charismatic and large old trees, structural complexity, and aesthetic grandeur. We believe that a Backcountry of this nature would not be suited to timber production, and that significant changes in the overstory would occur primarily through natural disturbance. However, we would welcome non-commercial management approaches like manual thinning, girdling, and prescribed fire to restore and maintain mature oak ecosystems. We also believe that protecting Backcountry values would entail limitations on new road construction and the leasing of federal minerals. However, we would support the construction, maintenance, expansion, and signage of non-mechanized trails and primitive campsites. And, we would support the establishment of wildlife food plots, as well as the removal of non-native invasive species.

A named Backcountry Area holds substantial promise for the surrounding region and for the Wayne. We look forward to working with you to make our shared Backcountry vision a reality.

Sincerely,

John Winnenberg
The Winding Road
Ohio's Hill Country Heritage Area

Samantha Sikorski
Mayor of Glouster Village

Nathan Simons
Village of Glouster

Brandy Mayle
Burr Oak Lodge & Conference Center

Debbie Phillips
Rural Action

Bruce Nation
Adjacent Landowner

Mike Steinmaus
Wildwood Inn and Llama Farm

Dan Jones
FullBrooks Cafe

Dana White
Local Hunter

William Ricketts
Burr Oak Marina

Mark Brunton
Burr Oak Getaways
Lunkermans Ltd.

Beverly Trovato
Village of Shawnee

Cheryl Blosser
Little Cities of Black Diamonds

Jane Cavarrozi
Dirty Girl Coffee

Andrew Bashaw
Buckeye Trail Association

Brian Blair
Forest Conservancy, Limited

Wendy Waite
Morgan County Convention & Visitors Bureau

Jennifer L'Heureux
Nelsonville Emporium

Evan Shaw
Local Hunter

Bob Garbo
Burr Oak Alive!

Kathy Tarantelli
Glouster Revitalization Organization

Earl Spohn
Monday Creek Township Volunteer Fire Dept.

Karen Raymore
Hocking Hills Tourism Association

Lew Barbini
Hocking Hills Adventures

Lauren Ketcham
Down the Road Farm

Henry Jochem
Primaterra Farm

Olivia and Erik Peterson
Fern Hollow Farm LLC

William Swallow
Perry County Think Tank on Poverty

JoAnn Rockhold
Appalachian Color In The Hills Festival

Freddie Greenfield
Land Lab

Beverly Trovato
Destination Shawnee
Shawnee Mercantile

