

From: [Stephen Thomas](#)
To: [FS-comments-southern-chokeee-watauga](#)
Subject: [External Email]Pond Mountain Project Support
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To Keith Kelley,

As a Unicoi County resident and avid sportsman, I'd like to pass along my support for the Pond Mountain Habitat projects on the North end of the Cherokee National Forest. Growing up in Unicoi County, I have spent much of my life running around in these National Forest Hills. I may be young but I have seen so many changes in my young 37 years to the flora and fauna in this area. Species that used to be common vanishing before our eyes. Some things beyond our control others that could be restored or saved with certain habitat measures that just have not been met. Timbering harvests in areas that make sense and have reached old growth stages. Forest stand Improvement techniques in other areas that have been degraded. Road daylighting 50 ft to create critical edges that many ground nesting birds need. Prescribed burning "scales" decreased to create more diversity within burn units and to target more specific objectives aside from just "fuel reduction.". There is ample research out there now to back the need to decreased the "scale" of prescribed burns and the impacts that has on specific species like quail, grouse and turkeys.

All in all we need more projects that specifically target early successional plant communities and regenerating stages of forest succession. Turkeys are struggling on the North Cherokee. Last year I walked and drove 20+ miles of forest roads. I didn't hear a single turkey gobble. That in itself is troubling.

I challenge you and all USFS employees to uphold the needs outlined in your 10 year Forest Management Plan guiding document. Don't just stop with this 8,000 acre pond Mountain Project. That is still only around 1% of the 650,000+ acres that makes up the Cherokee National Forest. Be an advocate for change, influence it and make it happen.

Stephen Thomas
East TN sportsman

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