



106 Sandpiper Circle
Kingsport, TN 37663
February 12, 2023

Carol Young, Acting Watauga District Ranger
4400 Unicoi Drive
Unicoi, TN 37692

In reference to: Pond Mountain [Forest Health] Project

Dear Mrs. Young:

Tennessee Eastman Hiking & Canoeing Club (TEHCC) continues to appreciate the opportunities to comment on USFS proposals. This one dated January 13, 2023 is to improve forest health in the Pond Mountain area south of the wilderness through vegetation management. Our club is a designated maintaining crew for the Appalachian Trail (A.T.), thus is our primary focus but will offer insights on other lands of interest. These comments are structured by each proposed action.

Action #1. Provide Early Successional Forest (Page 2)

Goal is to promote trees that provide food/nuts for bears by removing those that don't. No visible impact is expected for the A.T., including the 7 acres north of Bitter End

Action #2. Crop Tree (Page 4)

Chainsaw thinning is not expected to be visible, even with the closest plots being less than 0.5 mile from the Appalachian National Scenic Trail.

Action #3. Midstory (Page 5)

This thinning using herbicides right below White Rocks Mountain along the A.T. is probably the most concern for some visibility of dead vegetation. Dead tree leaves at 25% coverage should disappear in a year or two, while dead rhododendron leaves will hang on longer. However, the area has had significant fires in recent years and the views continue to improve.

Our concern is for contamination of the Moreland Gap Shelter water source and other unofficial water supplies south of the shelter that needs to be considered. The project plan could establish a desired minimum distance for the herbicide treatments from the A.T. in case hikers want to obtain water from streams emerging on that slope.

Action #4. Timber Stand Improvement (TSI) Release (Page 5)

The retreatment is deemed to be away from the A.T. except for Vanderpool Ridge on far right of map, but not a concern.

Action #5. Thinning with Group Selection (Page 6)

Similar to Action #1, thus likely no impact due to distance from A.T. and other trails in the area.

Action #6. Prescribed Burn (Page 7)

This treatment is clean up after Actions #1 and #5 over the longer term. It appears at least two forest trails #36 Lacy Trap and #39 Laurel Fork are being used as portions of the burn boundary, thus expectation is that good practices such as burning away from the trails would be employed.

Action #7. Wildlife Activities (Page 7)

Opening up the forest roads could ensure better access through less blowdowns across the roads, thus is desirable.

Action #8. Decommissioning of Illegal Routes (Page 8)

No specific locations stated are stated in the proposal, thus may be a carryover from a similar plan.

Action #10. Rhododendron thinning (Page 9)

Similar issue to Action #3 with the herbicide treatment. Some the designated area have headwaters that approach the Appalachian Trail. One member recalls that most water is flowing from trail west to east, so only flowing through herbicide after leaving trail. *A similar request to Action #3, maybe 200' from the trail and 800-1000' away from the water source at Moreland Gap Shelter.*

It is anticipated that these actions would be executed by the Cherokee National Forest trail crew and silviculturist group. TEHCC requests advance notification of any work occurring within 300' of the A.T. via an email to our atvolunteer@tehcc.org account that has to be acknowledged to proceed with scheduled event. The club will have knowledgeable resources ready to participate (possibly doing trial section work nearby) for consultation.

TEHCC supports the proposed forest management plan being reviewed by the Cherokee National Forest after resolution of the concerns in italics.

Sincerely,

Vic Hasler

Appalachian Trail Committee Chair
Tennessee Eastman Hiking & Canoeing Club

Copies to: Andrew Downs, Jerry Kyle, Matt Drury, and Morgan Sommerville, all with the Appalachian Trail Conservancy