



Watauga District Ranger
Cherokee National Forest
United States Forest Service
4400 Unicoi Drive, Unicoi, TN 37692

Re: Pond Mountain Project, Appalachian Trail Conservancy Comments

16 February 2023

Dear Watauga District Ranger,

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on proposed Pond Mountain Project. Overall, the Appalachian Trail Conservancy (ATC) are supportive of the intended objectives of the project work, however we do have some concerns that require further discussion and likely a site visit.

- ATC would like to ensure Visual Quality Objectives are being met as laid out in the Forest Plan – it appears that some of the treatment units may be visible from the A.T., most notably the units near Bitter End, though potentially some other areas as well. A site visit and discussion of treatments would be most helpful for our evaluation. We want to honor the Scenic Integrity Objective of High in A.T. Prescription Area 4A.
- ATC would like to further discuss the midstory treatments that are shown right on the Trail – we have concern over the visual impacts and a buffer may be in order. ATC also wants to ensure these vegetation and forest health treatments in the foreground enhance the A.T. experience.
- ATC wants to make sure every effort is undertaken to protect water quality and we would like to discuss the possibility of extended buffers around water sources.
- ATC appreciates that rhododendron is overrepresented on the landscape due to several factors like forest pests and past management practices, however we do have concerns that this management may have the potential to increase the water temperature of streams, exacerbating this issue after losing the hemlock in many places.

ATC is supportive of the desired outcomes associated with this project, and we look forward to engaging in discourse on how they can be best achieved. Thanks very much for the opportunity to participate and we appreciate your efforts.

In Partnership,

Matt Drury
Associate Director of Science and Stewardship
Appalachian Trail Conservancy

