Hello,

I am writing to you to discuss and share my opinion and hopefully provide some insight into many of the oppositions regarding the Jellico Vegetation Management Project. I am a resident of McCreary County who lives in the Osborne Creek and Hayes Creek area, an area directly affected by this proposed action. I have many different reasons for opposing this project, so I will start with the simple aspects of this aspect.

Although I am not against logging or the preservation of the forests, I do find it odd that this area was chosen to be cut and treated in a massive, 40 year project. The amount of time and resources necessary and required to complete such a project seem astronomically large. I find it extremely difficult for a singular ranger district to manage a project of this scale effectively for 40 years with a multitude of staffing changes, as well as other major outside factors like economics and the environment itself.

Next, I would like to speak on the specifics of an aspect that I find to be extremely important for the McCreary Countians, which is the socio-economic impacts that this would have on a struggling county. Although McCreary County has improved in recent years, it would be inaccurate to say that it has sustained the growth it would truly like to see and strive for. The total land ownership by the federal government, according to the NFS data, is 63.2%, contrasting that with the 16.4% in the other affected county, Whitley County. I find the total percentage of land owned by the Federal Government (closer to 70% according to other sources) in McCreary County to be staggering, and the usage of these lands by the Federal Government to be mismanagement.

It is stated in the socioeconomic report on the official NFS documents site that “ Project proposals can be initiated from external sources as well as from within the agency.” This is important because it speaks about using and implementing the views and help of the general public and the community around it, while none of this has been remotely discussed or entertained. Ideas proposed by the public that would have enabled the Forest Service to still implement this plan in a scaled down version while creating hiking and riding trails, as well as other recreational opportunities like campgrounds, were dismissed or simply never discussed in detail. An area in need of this due to its prior usage by locals and its high ceiling for future recreation should be something that is taken into major consideration, especially considering that there are no official recreation areas or trails in this area of the DBNF, which sits off to itself in the first place. It should be used and considered something other than a forest prime for cutting and “preservation.”

Further, the wildlife affected would face detrimental effects if not treated and cared for effectively. The NFS Wildlife Specialist Report:
“Although wildlife distribution and use may shift over time, based on this analysis there would be no significant negative effects to terrestrial or aquatic wildlife, or botanical resources under the proposed action. Additionally, available habitat for wildlife that presently use the project area would continue to be available and viable populations of local wildlife would be maintained, although at possibly lower population levels. Some species may benefit from positive effects as a result of the Proposed Action, and some to a lesser extent.”
I simply do not understand how a project of this magnitude cannot affect the wildlife in a major way. The summary statement quoted above seemingly contradicts itself by stating that although the habitat for some of these species that life in the affected area would be maintained, there could possibly be a decrease in population levels of these species. How would this be a good thing? If so many of these species are in need of conservation, then how does this project do anything to protect and help maintain the viability of these species?

Lastly, I would like to comment on the effects that this has on the individuals who live in this area. I find it appalling that the considerations of those living in these areas have generally been neglected. I respect and appreciate the willingness of those in positions of power to work with those of us, myself included, who have either directly or indirectly spoken to those in authority over this project, many in that position would simply neglect or refuse to do this in the first place. The issue at hand, from my point of view, is that those who will have to directly deal with the consequences of this project have been largely overlooked. As I am writing this my neighbor, who has spoken out against this openly and privately, is dealing with flooding in her yard due to heavy rains. My other neighbors have to deal with the flooding that comes from Osborne Creek, starting from the top of the mountain, which flows directly through their property and front yard. Their creek bed has slowly begun to erode more and more with each heavy rainstorm, and they cannot afford to have their property and buildings ruined or damaged because of preventable issues. There are people whose livelihoods are made off the land that is proposed to be cut and cleared off, they worry deeply about this, and I do not believe that there would be as large an opposition to this project if that weren't the case.

The National Forest Service motto is “Caring for the Land and Serving People.” Let's see this come to fruition.

Thank you.