

Re: FS Scoping Letter dated June 28, 2024 and the SAARTAB Recommendation Report

From: Terri Haver (terri.haver@gmail.com)

Title: Chairman of Back Country Horsemen of Tennessee

Date: July 22, 2024

As chairman of the Back Country Horsemen of TN, I am writing to support the Southern Region Forest Service goal of the Cherokee and surrounding National Forests. Our national organization's (BCHA) mission statement is to "perpetuate the commonsense use and enjoyment of horses in the back country and Wilderness" while we, as volunteers "educate, encourage and solicit active participation" in the use of them, for generations to come.

BCHA has given over \$12,000,000 worth of bona fide volunteer trail maintenance hours to the Forest Service this past year. In 2023 Tennessee gave \$250,000- or 5,384-man hours in the Cherokee National Forest on multi use trails, not just horse trails. We work side by side with our NFS in sustaining recreational trail systems and look forward to continued partnership.

There is an omission in the SAARTAB Report that recreation of any kind would be protected. It was only hinted at in the July 17th Forest Service virtual call. While we support the Southern Region 8 National Forest's goal of watershed resilience, water quality and aquatic habitat, we need some clarity of intentions in preserving ongoing recreational and horseback use. We ask that the Environmental Assessment (EA) address recreational use.

Few of the Southern Appalachian (SA) forests have completed trails-related plans that included formal designation of trails for public recreational use. Our recreation is limited by the condition of the forest roads to trailheads, trails that offer water for stock, and well-maintained trails. In some cases, current access is yet to be formally adopted and designated by the FS

We request that 1) unit-level forest staff work with local BCH chapters and other trail users to identify in advance existing system and non-system trails in watersheds subject to proposed restoration activity, and 2) that the proposed action in the upcoming EA include guidance on how local FS units might work proactively with recreation and trails organizations to communicate actions and objectives intended which will preserve and sustain public access for recreation

The local Back Country Horsemen Chapters of volunteers eagerly await the agency's EA with clarification on how SA trail recreation is to be managed. The SAARTAB report cited references of 40-year-old studies (some in foreign countries) on best practices of trail use in our unique Southern Appalachian region. We ask that pertinent and current data be used in sustaining public recreational access into each of these initiatives.

We are eager to enter dialogue with local forest staff to share information both ways on the best ways to support the impact of watershed health and retain and improve trail health.

We appreciate your consideration of trail recreation,