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COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA
DEPARTMENT OF CONSERVATION AND RECREATION

July 29, 2024

Jessie Howard
Project Coordinator
5162 Valleypointe Parkway
Roanoke, VA 24019

Re: Southern Appalachian Watershed Resiliency Project

Dear Ms. Howard:

The mission of the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation's Division of Natural Heritage (DCR-DNH) is to document, protect and manage "the habitats of rare, threatened, or endangered plant and animal species, rare or state-significant communities and other natural features" (section 10.1: 209-217, *Code of Virginia*).

Biotics documents the presence of natural heritage resources within the George Washington and Jefferson National Forests. DCR has reviewed the scoping notice and recommends that current updated resource information be utilized to inform the analysis of various watershed restoration and resiliency practices. New and updated information is continually added to Biotics.

According to the scoping notice, potential resiliency practices under consideration for inclusion include replacing culverts or bridges with ecologically functional crossings, culvert or bridge betterments, dam or obstruction removals, streambank restoration and habitat improvement, large wood debris augmentation, road and trail relocation, rare species habitat augmentation, water quality improvement projects, and/or non-native species treatment which some have potential adverse impacts to natural heritage resources along with long-term benefits. It would be helpful for the environmental assessment to clearly define the scope of all potential practices being considered as part of this project.

Under a Memorandum of Agreement established between the Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (VDACS) and the DCR, DCR represents VDACS in comments regarding potential impacts on state-listed threatened and endangered plant and insect species.

The Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources (VDWR) maintains a database of wildlife locations, including threatened and endangered species, trout streams, and anadromous fish waters that may contain information not documented in this letter. Their database may be accessed <https://services.dwr.virginia.gov/fwis/> or contact Hannah Schul at Hannah.Schul@dwr.virginia.gov.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) utilizes an online project review process (<https://www.fws.gov/office/virginia-ecological-services/virginia-field-office-online-review-process>) to facilitate compliance with the Endangered Species Act (16 U.S.C. 1531-1544, 87 Stat. 884) (ESA), as amended. The process enables users to 1) follow step-by-step guidance; 2) access information that will allow them to identify threatened and endangered species, designated critical habitat, and other Federal trust resources that may be

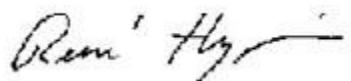
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*State Parks • Soil and Water Conservation • Outdoor Recreation Planning
Natural Heritage • Dam Safety and Floodplain Management • Land Conservation*

affected by their project; and 3) accurately reach determinations regarding the potential effects of their project on these resources as required under the ESA. If you have questions regarding the online review process, please contact Rachel Case at rachel_case@fws.gov.

Should you have any questions or concerns, feel free to contact me at 804-371-2708. Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this scoping notice.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "René Hypes".

S. René Hypes
Natural Heritage Project Review Coordinator