



July 29, 2024

USDA Forest Service
Jessie Howard
5162 Valleypointe Parkway
Roanoke, VA 24019

Dear Jessie:

All of us at American Rivers deeply appreciate the Forest Service's effort to increase the pace and scale of watershed resiliency projects in the Southern Appalachian subregion. Rivers are the life source of every living thing in our country. Free-flowing, clean and strong, they provide our nation's most important natural resource, clean water. Blocked, polluted and reduced to a trickle, the entire system breaks down, jeopardizing our health and very existence.

Specifically, dam removal and culvert replacement projects are ecologically and economically common-sense solutions to allow rivers to be free-flowing, resilient to climate change, support cultural uses, and protect biodiversity under threat – these actions should be included in the EA. These methods of river restoration are tested, successful in restoring ecology, and are proven methods of reducing impacts from flooding providing economic benefits. With many successful projects completed by the USFS and partners, there exists a strong community of practice of experienced practitioners to achieve successful projects that minimize short term impacts in the implementation of projects while maximizing long term benefits. With increasing impacts from severe weather, the faster we can implement dam removals and other obstruction removal projects like berm and levee removal, the more resilient communities are.

American Rivers participated in the Southern Appalachian Restoration Technical Advisory Board (SAARTAB) and points to those comments for more in-depth support of dam removal and culvert replacement. Robust groups working on aquatic connectivity in North Carolina, South Carolina, Virginia, Georgia, and Tennessee are established and are great resources for collaboration. Also, dam removal handbooks exist for North Carolina, South Carolina, and Georgia and might be helpful resources for establishing the toolbox to achieve restoration on US Forest Service lands. We also recommend that you look to the Pacific Northwest Region Aquatic Restoration Project Environmental Assessment completed by Forest Service Region 6 for examples on how the known benefits and impacts of dam removal were evaluated within the environmental assessment.

Our mission to protect wild rivers, restore damaged rivers and conserve clean water for people and nature has never been more necessary or more urgent. With your continued collaboration, American Rivers will take substantial strides toward our shared vision of a nation of clean, healthy rivers that sustain and connect us — benefitting people and wildlife, cities and rural communities, the economy and the environment.



We are deeply grateful for your efforts to improve the practice of restoring rivers and watersheds. We look forward to ongoing collaboration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink that reads "Erin Singer McCombs".

Erin Singer McCombs
Conservation Director, Southeast
29 N. Market St., Suite 603A
Asheville, NC 28801
emccombs@americanrivers.org
828-649-7887