



NATIONAL DEER ASSOCIATION

P.O. Box 162305 · Atlanta, Georgia 30321 · phone: 1-800-209-3337 · DEERASSOCIATION.com

Attn. Andrew Carrier
Cherokee National Forest
250 Ranger Station Rd.
Tellico Plains, TN 37385

RE: Public Comment in Support of the Sugar Mountain Project – Cherokee National Forest

To Whom It May Concern,

On behalf of the National Deer Association (NDA) and our members throughout the region, we are writing to express our support for the proposed *Sugar Mountain Project* in the Tellico Ranger District of the Cherokee National Forest. We commend the Forest Service for identifying and prioritizing two essential objectives in the plan: (1) creating early successional habitat to benefit wildlife, and (2) improving forest health with an emphasis on diverse stand conditions. Both of these align with NDA's mission of ensuring the future of wild deer, wildlife habitat, and hunting.

NDA recognizes the urgent need to restore early successional habitats—grasslands, shrublands, open woodlands, and regenerating forests—many of which have declined significantly across the Southern Appalachians. As the Forest Service has noted, population monitoring of crucial early successional species shows continued decline in the Tellico Ranger District, a trend that must be reversed to sustain viable wildlife populations. As an organization dedicated to the health of deer populations, we know that white-tailed deer and a suite of other game and non-game species benefit greatly from the improved forage, cover, and edge conditions that early successional habitats provide.

We also support the project's second key objective: improving forest health through actions designed to increase structural diversity, enhance growing conditions for desired species, and promote regeneration through canopy openings. The current imbalance in age classes, overstocked stands, and low regeneration potential threatens the long-term sustainability of forest ecosystems in this area.

Healthy forests and healthy wildlife go hand-in-hand. Through thoughtful, proactive vegetation management, the *Sugar Mountain Project* will enhance habitat for a host of species while improving forest resilience in the face of future challenges such as disease, pests, and climate change.

Sincerely,

Catherine Appling Pooler
Director of Policy