



December 23, 2025

Troy Waskey, District Ranger
Nantahala Ranger District
Nantahala National Forest
90 Sloan Road
Franklin, NC 28734

Re: Northside Restoration Project

Dear District Ranger Waskey,

On behalf of the Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation, I write to express our support for the Northside Restoration Project to restore forest structure and species composition and improve wildlife habitat in the Cowee and Plott Balsam Mountains on the Nantahala National Forest. The Alternative 2 – Proposed Action will improve access and hunting opportunities for North Carolina's sportsmen and women.

Founded in 1989, the Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation (CSF) is the informed authority across outdoor issues and serves as the primary conduit for influencing public policy. Working with the Congressional Sportsmen's Caucus (CSC), the Governors Sportsmen's Caucus (GSC), and the National Assembly of Sportsmen's Caucuses (NASC), CSF gives a voice to hunters, anglers, recreational shooters, and trappers on Capitol Hill and throughout state capitols advocating on vital outdoor issues that are the backbone of our nation's conservation legacy.

CSF supports the proposed vegetation management activities to increase forest age class diversity and forest health across the Project Area. The Great Balsam Geographic Area (and the Nantahala National Forest at large) is overrepresented by older forest age classes to the detriment of wildlife diversity. The proposed regeneration harvests and shelterwood cuts will create much-needed young forests at higher elevations to support ruffed grouse and golden-winged warbler, which are both identified as Species of Greatest Conservation Need in the draft 2025 North Carolina Wildlife Action Plan.¹ The young forests will also benefit American woodcock, wild turkey, white-tailed deer, black bear, and several songbird species.

¹ <https://www.ncwildlife.gov/media/4411/download?attachment>

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CSF supports the thinnings to restore open forests and increase understory vegetative diversity as well as the yellow poplar stand thinning to promote the recruitment of more shade tolerant species. We also support the noncommercial timber stand treatments to promote oak regeneration, release suppressed red spruce, and favor hard mast-producing species important to wildlife. We additionally support the prescribed burns and cultural burns, in conjunction with the various silvicultural treatments, to restore oak forests, arrest mesophication, and improve wildlife habitat. Last, we are excited to see the creation of more permanent wildlife openings and are thankful that the linear wildlife openings will be maintained.

Our only recommendation for revision would be to add additional harvests to create more young forests. The project will increase the amount of young forest in the Great Balsam Geographic Area to only 1.6% , and we encourage you to look for opportunities to create more regenerating forests to support the wildlife species that depend on this critical habitat component.

CSF represents the interests of North Carolina's sportsmen and women, the primary funders of state-based conservation efforts and significant contributors to North Carolina's economy, who depend on access to the Nantahala National Forest to pursue their outdoor pastimes. As reported by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for 2025, North Carolina's sportsmen and women generated over \$78.8 million for state-based conservation through hunting and fishing license sales and matching Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration Program funds.² Hunters in North Carolina support 10,900 jobs, \$397 million in salaries and wages, and \$58 million in state and local taxes, with a total economic effect of \$1.4 billion.³

The Alternative 2 – Proposed Action will help move the project area towards the desired future conditions detailed in the 2023 Nantahala and Pisgah National Forests Land Management Plan, and we hope to see you all carry out more projects in partnership with the North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission and the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians to support wildlife and North Carolina's hunting traditions. Thank you for considering our comments.

Sincerely,



John Culclasure

² <https://congressionalsportsmen.org/reports/north-carolina-american-system-of-conservation-funding-fact-sheet/>

³ "Economic Impacts of Hunting and Target Shooting – Technical Report." Southwick Associates, produced for the Sportsmen's Alliance Foundation. December 2021. <https://sportsmensalliance.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/2020-Economic-Impact-of-Hunting-and-Shooting-Technical-Report-V2.pdf>

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