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Organization: Sierra Club - Virginia Chapter

Title:

Comments: Dear Dan McKeague, we, the undersigned, writes today to express my deep concern over the Eastern Divide Insect and Disease Project Phase II. There are many issues with this proposed plan including : The project would include intense logging planned in an area set aside to protecting drinking water for Pulaski, Virginia, The project would include 600 acres of logging in and around the 7,008 acre Dismal Creek Virginia Mountain Treasure area. Dismal Creek area is a large, remote area with a sizeable core of Forest Service-identified semi-primitive recreation land. The area is unique because it offers an opportunity to walk for miles and miles in a secluded valley hemmed in by a wedge of two mountains. The Appalachian Trail and connecting Ribble Trail are nearby. The project could include logging in protected old growth areas and protected areas designated for recreation. The project could potentially impact aquatic species such as the Federally endangered candy darter, could potentially impact four species of rare or listed bats, and other rare or listed species. The project is problematic because the Forest Service relies on watered-down analysis that is totally inadequate. The public deserves to know the full story because this land is held in the public trust, and assertions that insect and disease are an imminent threat or that the Forest Services logging activities will improve forest health are not demonstrated by your agency. The acreage of logging is excessive. The 1200 acres of logging here is proposed on top of the 1200 acre Eastern Divide Insect and Disease Project Phase I project on the same ranger district, approved without analysis ? a total of 2400 acres of logging. In addition, there will be 75,000 acres of prescribed burning in this district. The Forest Service should more thoroughly evaluate combined impacts of all three before proceeding ? through an Environmental Impact Statement. At a minimum, the agency should complete new analysis that includes the new alternative and satisfactorily complies with the law. This Draft Environmental Analysis does not. Once new analysis is completed, the public should be afforded the opportunity to review and comment on it. This is necessary to give the public a chance to review and comment on all of the analysis the Forest Service needs to do. It is for the aforementioned reasons and more than I ask you to conduct a thorough environmental impact statement before proceeding with this project. I also ask that you allow for public input before proceeding. The undersigned thank you for considering our strong concerns.