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Organization: Ohio's Winding Road / Ohio's Hill Country Heritage Area

Title:

Comments: REQUEST FOR A WAYNE NATIONAL FOREST BACKCOUNTRY AREA

March 20, 2020

Wayne National Forest

Supervisor's Office

c/o Forest Plan Revision Team

13700 US Highway 33

Nelsonville, OH 45764

Re: Forest Plan Revision - Backcountry Conditions, Trends, and Request

Dear Wayne National Forest Plan Revision Team,

We request the creation of a named Backcountry Area in the northern tier of the Wayne National Forest's Athens Unit. The Backcountry we envision is an extensive and remote space managed for wildlife carrying capacity, impressive pre-settlement aesthetics, and non-mechanized recreation like hiking, hunting, backpacking, horseback riding, and camping. Opening a named Backcountry Area here will stimulate the region's economy, serve unmet demand for deep woods recreation, and enhance the Wayne's relevance and status as a destination.

The named Backcountry Area we seek is located in the heart of the Athens Unit's hiking and horse riding trails. It includes the Wildcat Hollow trail network, and it spans the rugged and scenic Buckeye Trail/North Country Trail sections (and proposed reroute) from Burr Oak State Park in the east through the Old Stone Church area in the west. The Backcountry would unite the Athens Unit's non-mechanized trail areas by replacing the current Athens Unit FSM, FOF, and DCF management areas north of State Routes 93, 216, and 685 (Baileys parcel(s) excluded).

This is a region of small communities with rich historical legacies and charm [mdash] communities that are poised to benefit from a growing outdoor recreation economy (\$24.3 billion annually in Ohio alone). Rural counties with large amounts of protected federal land (Wilderness, National Monuments, National Parks, etc.) enjoy jobs growth at more than double the rate of rural counties whose federal lands are largely unprotected. A named Backcountry Area here would attract tourism dollars, feed a strong local entrepreneurial spirit, and grow incomes and property values [mdash] all while protecting and celebrating local heritage.

Our members, constituents, and patrons are hungry for access to quality deep woods recreation. Although Ohio has forestland, it has very few old, expansive forests where visitors can immerse themselves in awe-inspiring grandeur. 77% of Ohio's forestland is located within a quarter mile of roadway. Less than 0.4% of forest stands in Ohio are more than 140 years-old. These challenges are part of what makes the Backcountry Area we propose so compelling. This Area contains six roadless parcels in excess of 1,000 acres. And, it harbors some of the Wayne's largest and oldest trees. Protecting this Area will preserve its intact and roadless qualities and allow for the recovery of impressive natural features.

We seek a Backcountry managed for historic and old-growth attributes, including charismatic and large old trees, structural complexity, and aesthetic grandeur. We believe that a Backcountry of this nature would not be suited to timber production, and that significant changes in the overstory would occur primarily through natural disturbance. However, we would welcome non-commercial management approaches like manual thinning, girdling, and prescribed fire to restore and maintain mature oak ecosystems. We also believe that protecting Backcountry values would entail limitations on new road construction and the leasing of federal minerals. However, we would support the construction, maintenance, expansion, and signage of non-mechanized trails and primitive campsites. And, we would support the establishment of wildlife food plots, as well as the removal of non-native invasive species.

A named Backcountry Area holds substantial promise for the surrounding region and for the Wayne. We look forward to working with you to make our shared Backcountry vision a reality.

Sincerely, John Winnenberg
The Winding Road
Ohio's Hill Country Heritage Area
Mark Brunton
Burr Oak
Getaways
Lunkermans Ltd.

Samantha Sikorski
Mayor of Glouster Village
Beverly Trovato
Village of Shawnee

Nathan Simons
Village of Glouster
Cheryl Blosser
Little Cities of Black Diamonds

Brandy Mayle
Burr Oak Lodge & Conference Center
Jane Cavarrozi
Dirty Girl Coffee

Debbie Phillips
Rural Action
Andrew Bashaw
Buckeye Trail Association

Bruce Nation
Adjacent Landowner
Brian Blair
Forest Conservancy, Limited

Mike Steinmaus
Wildwood Inn and Llama Farm
Wendy Waite
Morgan County Convention & Visitors Bureau

Dan Jones
Full Brooks Cafe
Jennifer L'Heureux
Nelsonville Emporium

Dana White
Local Hunter
Evan Shaw
Local Hunter

William Ricketts
Burr Oak Marina
Bob Garbo
Burr Oak Alive!