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First name: Ed

Last name: Gaunch

Organization: WV Department of Commerce

Title:

Comments: July 22, 2021

Jon Morgan, District Ranger Cheat-Potomac Ranger District

2499 North Fork Highway Petersburg, WV 26847

RE: Upper Cheat River Project Dear Ranger Morgan:

Please allow me to take this opportunity to express my support of the Upper Cheat River Project. The Division of Forestry and the Division of Natural Resources are two of the agencies that comprise the Department of Commerce; therefore, I am well aware that the conditions on the Monongahela National Forest are believed to be less than ideal to preserve the forest, promote wildlife and minimize natural disasters.

After consultation with agency leaders, I am confident that the approval of the proposed 10-year plan for the Upper Cheat River Project would implement a more aggressive silviculture management practice designed to alleviate many of our concerns. Specifically, I am excited that the implementation of this plan will improve the overall health of the forest, identify and reduce invasive species, diversify wildlife habitats, increase harvesting and minimize the threat of wildfires.

Additionally, the forest-products industry is a major economic driver in West Virginia contributing an estimated \$3.4 billion to the state's economy annually. I have heard concerns from business representatives regarding the lack of available raw materials necessary not only to meet demand, but also to sustain the industry in the foreseeable future. An increase in harvesting mature timber stands would greatly assist the industry in meeting future needs and continuing its contribution to the state's economy by providing invaluable jobs, raw resources necessary to supply manufacturers and contributing much needed revenue to our local communities.

Thank you for the opportunity to relay my support of this important project. If there is anything I can do to ensure its success, please do not hesitate to contact me anytime.

Sincerely,

Ed Gaunch

cc:

Shawn Cochran, Superintendent Monongahela National Forest

The Honorable Shelly Moore Capito United States Senate

The Honorable Joe Manchin United States Senate

The Honorable David McKinley United States House of Representatives

The Honorable Alex Mooney United States House of Representatives

The Honorable Carol Miller United States House of Representatives

Tom Cover, Director/State Forester WV Division of Forestry

Stephen McDaniel, Director West Virginia Division of Natural Resources