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Comments: Ranger Christensen, Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the proposed Bland County Water System Improvement Project. The Appalachian Trail Conservancy (ATC), the Piedmont A.T. Hikers (PATH) and the Eastern Divide Ranger District have a long and successful history of partnership dedicated to protecting the A.T. Experience by implementing the Jefferson National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan and engaging in substantive review of proposed actions that could negatively impact the Appalachian National Scenic Trail (ANST). Based on a 2019 field visit, we do not oppose the proposed project, however given the length of time between that review and this proposed action, we do request a field visit that includes Forest Service staff, ATC, PATH, and project representatives to review the details of the proposal and potential impacts and mitigation measures to ensure hiker safety and minimize impact to the ANST. In preparation for these field visits, we request an updated map set for the project including a shapefile of the proposed project. Finally, given that the current location of the ANST is not on the mutually identified optimal location, we hope this is an opportunity to continue a conversation focused on establishing the Trail at a location that fully protects the A.T. Experience and the characteristics that designated the ANST as the Nation's first National Scenic Trail. In Partnership, Andrew Downs
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