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Title:

Comments: To whom it may concern,

Although I do not officially represent an organization, I am directly involved with both the Cayuga Trails Club in Ithaca New York, and the Finger Lakes Trail Conference, both of which are concerned with hiking trails in the area of the Finger Lakes National Forest.

I have read the description and processes proposed for the Grassland Enhancement Project and have spoken with the FLNF officials and fully support the objectives of the project. I am pleased to see the Forest Service partnering with the New York DEC to help preserve the dwindling habitat available for native bird species. This is a critical issue in New York and across the nation if not the world.

I would raise two points of concern that I believe the hiking community will have regarding this project considering that the Finger Lakes Trail travels through the Finger Lakes National Forest as well as numerous other Forest Service and FLTC trails.

First is the use of herbicides at one step in the process of regenerating the identified plots of land. There is concern both for effects on the general environment and also regarding any contact that hikers on trails in the vicinity of the application of herbicides might accidentally have. My sense is that both the NY DEC and the Forest Service are likely to act responsibly in the application and use of chemical herbicides using carefully chosen formulations and applying the minimum amount needed to have the desired results. Presumably where any human contact might be possible some sort of warning or signage would be installed for the appropriate period of time. The trail management organizations have available methods to help disseminate information to the hiking community and would be pleased to help the Forest Service in this way.

The second point I would raise would be regarding the necessary trail closures due to controlled burning and herbicide application. This is a secondary concern as the trail community in this area has a history of close cooperation between the Forest Service and the organizations that manage trails. The trail community would expect to work with the Forest Service as the project goes forward to inform the hiking community when burning or other activities are planned and implemented and work with the hiking community to mitigate affects on hikers' experiences in the area. The hope is that any needed trail closures would be for short durations.

I appreciate the opportunity to comment on this project.