

Data Submitted (UTC 11): 1/8/2020 1:13:37 AM

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Comments: Many have been working to improve the U.S. Forest Service's proposed Foothills Landscape Project. Unfortunately, the agency has rejected many of our concerns and suggestions.

In brief, the project would allow the Forest Service to take a variety of actions - including logging, prescribed burning, herbicide application, and changing the recreation system - across a massive swath of land in the Chattahoochee National Forest.

How massive? The Foothills Landscape area is about 157,000 acres - nearly twice the size of the city of Atlanta - and includes parts of Dawson, Fannin, Gilmer, Habersham, Lumpkin, Murray, Rabun, and White counties.

The proposal represents a new approach by the Forest Service. Typically, a logging or road project, for example, is announced for a specific area, then the Forest Service asks the public to weigh in, looks at the environmental impacts, and makes a decision.

But with this Foothills Project the Forest Service is not providing site-specific proposals. Instead, the Forest Service is announcing that somewhere in this massive area it plans to:

- Allow for 60,000 acres of commercial timber harvesting;
- Conduct prescribed burning on 50,000 acres;
- Apply herbicide across up to 74,500 acres (nearly HALF the entire project area!);
- Reroute up to 111 miles of trails; and
- Build an undisclosed amount of "temporary" roads.

The Forest Service is not telling the public where any of these actions will take place on the ground, making it almost impossible to meaningfully assess the impacts of the proposal.

Cutting down trees in some areas of the forest may be relatively harmless, but logging in the wrong places could have a devastating effect on the forest's complex ecosystem.

Finally, the Forest Service is trying to satisfy the only legally-required public comment opportunities now before it decides where it will log, burn, etc. By the time the agency makes meaningful site-specific decisions, public participation required by law will have closed.

Please do not try to conduct the environmental analysis or satisfy public participation requirements before making decisions about where actions will occur. Your ability to have a meaningful say in the management of this 157,000-acre area for decades may be on the line.

Thank you for accepting my comments.