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First name: Joshua

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Organization:

Title:

Comments: Hello,

My name is Joshua Spence. I am a Murray County citizen and have resided here for forty years. I am also a Wildlife Conservationist, citizen scientist and naturalist. I have been conducting an ongoing countywide breeding bird project for over a decade. I am very familiar with the Cohutta Mountains of Murray, Gilmer and Fannin Counties. I am also aware of the needs of our native species in the Cohutta Mountains and the responsibility we have to preserve and manage these natural resources.

I am glad to hear of the prospect that the USFS will be taking an active role in habitat improvement on the vast National Forests of North GA. I know forest preservation has been the primary model of the USFS for decades. This does include the disallowance of timber cutting and fire suppression. This old model has resulted in low species diversity in much of our foothills. The current landcover is mostly even-aged stands with limited tree species. I do agree with the science behind the project plan to implement select timber cuts and prescribed burns. This will improve the habitat for many native species and increase natural diversity among the flora and fauna of the North Georgia Appalachian Mountains.

I am supportive of the Foothills Landscape Project. I have personally observed and contrasted the difference between land parcels with a more open canopy to those that have a closed canopy. The open canopy sites always host a wider diversity of species. Obviously, I hope that the approach to improve our natural communities will be a product of careful planning, research, good science, etc. I personally believe the first sites that should be altered are areas where thick pine stands predominate, unnatural settings and areas where human alteration has had a negative impact on the landcover. I do not want to see forest clearing at Old Growth sites, but do not oppose prescribed burning in these areas. I am wary of the building of roads and hope that respect for the tributaries will be high priority when this is necessary.

I hope to visit the sites after the work is completed to conduct bird surveys. I can compare this to past surveys and conclude that there has been an improvement, which is almost certain. I hope that with the project we can see a return of some of our rarest bird species such as Cerulean Warbler and Golden-winged Warbler. I have been impressed with the results of the prescribed burning along Hickory Ridge in Murray County. I believe our local Wildlife Biologist and company have done an excellent job.

Please place me on your email list so I can receive updates on the project's advancements. If there is any degree of assistance from the general public needed, if only positive public relations, please keep me in mind.

Thank you,

Joshua Spence