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Organization:

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Comments: Dear Ms. Jewett:

The Foothills Landscape Project - so huge, overwhelming actually - so, where to begin?

First, I am impressed with the amount of thinking and work that has gone into assessing the current conditions and need for restoration. I have read the environmental assessment and do not have the technical background in ecology and forestry to comment with great certainty. At first blink the project seems worthwhile, but when I think about the beautiful forest we have I wonder how much we should tamper with it as it has developed over the years. As I read about the thinning and mastication and opening the canopy, my mind kept being filled with images of a barren landscape, at least for the remainder of my lifetime.

I wondered if we can/should try to return such a vast area to a previous time. Granted many proposed actions are maintenance/improvement/prevention-of-further-degradation oriented, and those are certainly merited.

I concur with encouraging the oaks, and protecting the hemlocks; but is southern yellow pine really better than white pine, except for commercial use? Is it worth masticating mountain laurel for any purpose?

As a former 36-year federal employee in an organization that relied heavily on internal expertise with a dose of seriously considered public input, I have a few suggestions to offer, with confidence that the Forestry Service is as well-intentioned as my former organization.

- 1.Consider seriously the aesthetics and magnificence of the forest as it has developed and the extent to which restoration is merited.
- 2.Do not let commercial interests drive the process.
- 3.Do proceed with expansion/improvement/relocation of trails.
- 4.Do proceed with actions to protect the streams.
- 5.Do make every effort to protect stands of hemlock trees.
- 6.Do encourage health of the populations of oak trees.
- 7.Do identify and protect old-growth areas.
- 8.Minimize use of herbicides.
- 9.Minimize "road" damage to areas that are logged.
- 10.Pay special attention to protecting the "wild areas" identified in "Georgia's Mountain Treasures" - published in 2018 by Georgia ForestWatch. This would be consistent with the statement on page AP73 of the implementation plan: "...work with the community to identify areas that are highly valued. Protect user access to these areas while reducing impacts to Outstanding Remarkable Values...within this treasured area."
- 11.Keep open the lines of communication with interested groups and individuals in terms of pre-notification of major actions to be taken - where, when, and how - and seek input as would be useful to the Forestry Service and to persons who enjoy the forest as a wilderness preserve.

I am aware that making decisions on issues in which the public has interest is not easy and can be frustrating sometimes to the most well-intentioned person privileged to be in position to make those decisions. I hope you can enjoy the process, and I wish you the best of clear thinking as this project moves to fruition.

Elvin Hilyer