

Data Submitted (UTC 11): 1/9/2020 11:48:06 PM

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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