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Title:

Comments:

I welcome the opportunity to comment on the Foothills Landscape project, however limited. The announcement came just a month ago, right before the holidays, and ends barely into the new year. It makes one wonder whether the Forest Service values citizen input. What I saw of the public forums was not encouraging.

It is difficult to comment on the proposal itself. It covers a vast expanse of land treasured by Georgia's residents and visitors. It proposes a variety of actions (logging, herbicide application, road building) on tremendous scale, without indication of where these would occur.

I find the numbers interesting, not solely because of their enormous scale. The total size of project is 157,000 acres. Yet within that we see:

Area to be logged - 60,000+ acres

Area to be burned - 50,000 acres

Herbicide application - 74,000 acres

Industrial grinding - 83,000 acres

Logging, burning, and herbicide would occur on 184,000 acres of a 157,000 total area? Will areas be sprayed with herbicides and then burned? How are there 23,000 more acres of grinding than logging?

I'm sure others have noted the proposed use of glyphosate and other dangerous chemicals on these 74,000 acres, land we use for recreation, areas wildlife depend on. But one has to wonder how carefully herbicide can be applied to 74,000 acres. At the pace that would require, scorched earth is the only realistic outcome.

The proposal includes 360 *MILES* of new bulldozer paths. This is about the distance from Atlanta to Charleston South Carolina, a 6 hour trip. Such roads would need to be 15-20' wide, so that's 870 acres of our beautiful forest allocated just to bulldozer traffic. Road construction will create significant disturbance at least twice that width, so we're approaching 1800 acres of national forest lost to plants and animals, including us. For bulldozer trails. No matter how well constructed, every bit of that 360 miles will cause debris and silt runoff into pristine waterways, many of which are headwaters to the water supply of millions of people. And what happens when they are no longer maintained?

Then there are the vague "new temporary" roads of undisclosed extent or location. Temporary roads will logically not be well constructed, creating yet more silting and debris in our waters.

I'm truly shocked that the Forest Service intends to force this upon the people of Georgia, that a project to such enormous scale could be greenlighted with no meaningful information and therefore, even beyond the timing of this comment period, no meaningful way to provide substantive and helpful comments. This is a foolish approach for the Forest Service to take - unless of course the sole goal is to proceed come what may.

There are dozens if not hundreds of people who are knowledgeable and passionate about these lands. Between them, they know the vast majority of the areas within this project as well as I know my herb garden. They KNOW where special habitats are, where colonies of rare and endangered plants are, where bear dens are, the best trout streams, bird nesting and watching areas

If this project we being handled in normal fashion, the proposal would entail specific plans and the precise areas

and those people could weigh in!

You're going to reroute 111 miles of trails without input from the users - hikers, mountain bikers, horse riders. Our economy depends on the tourism dollars those users spend!

If allowed, this project would take decades to complete. It appears that the Forest Service expects to get a blank check from the public, to do whatever might fall within these vague parameters on our public land. We, the public, those most knowledgeable about these forests, will be excluded from meaningful comment, those who recreate, hunt, birdwatch on these our public lands will have no input on whatever the Forest Service at some later point decides to do within these extremely broad and vague parameters.

The implications go even beyond this 157,000 acres. Owners of property abutting the project must be worried sick about the implications for their health, enjoyment and property values. The many who depend on tourism dollars have to be concerned, if recreation areas are in jeopardy. All who value the simple knowledge that we have beauty and a relatively safe place for wildlife, that pollinators have an area that hasn't been contaminated with herbicides, are troubled. And I'm particularly worried about the implications for water quality.

Given the time allowed, I wasn't able to carefully read the materials. However, it seems that this whole project is prompted by a concern, basically, that the trees are about the same age. That would be a logical result of recovery from a past clearcut. Different trees have different life spans, whether because of species, siting or soil. A wiser Forest Service would allow nature to run its course and find an actual problem to address.

If there's money available, it should be spent on the decrepit Forest Service roads we already have, some of which are dangerous and filling our streams with gravel.