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Organization:

Title:

Comments: Firstly, thank you for providing us with a detailed and easily understandable environmental assessment. I am a property owner within the project bounds, surrounded on all sides, so this has the potential to impact me and my family directly.

This project addresses many concerns I have regarding the status of the forest lands in this area. In particular the dense, overstocked pine stands with significant amounts of fuel built up in the understory are a fire hazard and do not provide quality habitat for wildlife. Further, the landscape is missing understory herbaceous cover and a lack of canopy gaps. Areas which have been impacted by fire, such as the upper Tallulah River and Paterson Gap area, seem to have a much more diverse understory and a healthy mature hardwood overstory. Therefore I support silvicultural treatment of gap openings, prescribed fire, wildlife openings, thinning, and open oak woodland regeneration. From an aesthetic perspective, these practices sometimes open spectacular views, especially when they occur on ridges. I support limited use of pesticides in scenarios where mechanical or cultural treatments are not practicable (particularly for invasive species) but am highly opposed to aerial application.

I am concerned about the further development of southern yellow pine stands. Although, according to this project it is classified as a foothill area, there are many ridges and peaks over 3,000 ft in elevation and home to some of the southern-most stands of white pine. I am unclear why this area would be managed for yellow pines, aside from the fact that lumber is potentially more valuable and to future proof against climate change. Adding a regular fire regime would naturally select for fire tolerant pine species, as is. White pines, are a unique feature of this area, while yellow pines can be found in abundance in the piedmont and coastal plain. I do not support the explicit development of yellow pine stands except as it occurs naturally in areas of frequent fire.

Conversely I support an increased classification of old growth forest to balance the disturbance caused by the aforementioned practices. I also support the development of more non-motorized multi-use trails. Closing non-motorized cultural trails do not warrant attention, in my opinion.

Improving the health of our cold water streams is very important to me as is habitat restoration. The plan looks very positive in these aspects.

I am strongly opposed to the sale of Forest Service lands, except for small fragments disconnected from greater Forest Service areas (Glassy Mtn is an example of an unacceptable sale). Any proceeds acquired through land sales should be used to purchase more appropriate lands to avoid a net loss of public land.

Thank you for your consideration and best of luck with the project.