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Organization: Back Country Horsemen of NC

Title: Public Lands Representative

Comments: Back Country Horsemen of North Carolina

To - James Melonas, USFS NC Supervisor, Sheryl Bryan and staff

Regards - Maintenance of Permanent Wildlife Openings.

Oct 7, 2021

Dear USFS NC Staff:

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the proposal of maintaining wildlife openings across the Forests in NC. We appreciate the chance to share a couple of points in regards with the scoping letter of Sept, 2021.

We realize the importance of wildlife habitats for the many species that thrive in early successional habitat areas. Our members' forest experiences are greatly enhanced by being able to enjoy wildlife and many of our members are also hunters.

As you know, Back Country Horsemen is a service organization, advocating for equestrian access across our public lands. Our mission statement includes maintaining those trails in our areas of responsibility. Members of our chapters routinely ride and clear the pack and stock trails with chain saws and loppers to keep these routes open.

In studying the shape files of the inventoried wildlife openings, we have identified overlap of these openings with designated pack and stock trails. This brings us a great opportunity for partnership in your maintenance efforts. The efficiency of the maintenance of these wildlife openings could be enhanced by a process of information sharing between the Forest Service department and our organization at the State level.

We also would like to have the Forest Service, in this scoping process, give clear guidelines for the access of these wildlife openings by bicycles and pack and stock. In the past, there has been some discussion of disallowing users from wildlife openings, even though those openings are currently on the USFS NC Recreation designated mapping systems as allowing bicycles and/or pack and stock users. Specifically, we would like to see the scoping process recognize the current authorized users as being allowed access on permanent wildlife openings unless currently signed otherwise. We would ask that you facilitate coordination to include those high value, currently undesignated, but future proposed trails. Our chapters would be glad to work with local staff to identify these trails.

There are concerns that increased "day lighting" of roads may result in increased roadside camping with the associated litter and degradation. Please consider adding "no camping" signs to these sections.

Finally, we would like to offer to help identify current signed wildlife openings that don't appear on the inventory. If there is no plan to keep them in the inventory, we would like the Forest Service to consider allowing access for bicycles and pack and stock use to them.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback on this scoping letter and we look forward to your answer.

Sincerely,

Deirdre Perot
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