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Title:

Comments: I support the fully support the Crossover Project and its benefits to forests, wildlife and working lands

economies. Below are justifications for the project.

- 1.According to the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies' Eastern Grouse Working Group report in December 2020, ruffed grouse populations have declined 71% since 1989 in the Southern Appalachians (Eastern Grouse Working Group, 2020).
- 2. The report identified that, "Loss of young forests across the landscape is the primary driver of this decline." The species is identified as a Species of Greatest Conservation Need in North Carolina's State Wildlife Action Plan (North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission, 2015).
- 3. The best available science suggests that maintaining 8-14% early successional habitat across the Nantahala and Pisgah National Forests would optimize for bird diversity, including "young forest obligates" and "mature forest obligates" (Jacobs & Digates).
- 4.To ensure viable wildlife populations are maintained long-term, it is essential that we maintain early successional habitat conditions somewhere within the 8-14% range.
- 5. The 8.5% young forest habitat created through the Crossover Project will make a meaningful contribution towards meeting Forest-wide objectives for young forest habitat.

Sincerely, Charlie Faires