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Title:

Comments: We are at a fork in the road, y'all.

One path continues dragging our public land through the throes of capitalism, exploiting resources that are supposedly "protected" by a federal agency whose mission is "caring for the land and serving people". The other path meanders peacefully through the forest, passing by 200+ year old oaks for the pleasure of their good tidings instead of how much money they fetch. If we continue to treat our wild, public lands like the daycare cookie jar, eventually we are going to get a gnarly case of the flu AND we're going to run out of cookies.

Every decision we make today will have generations of people growing into adulthood with a slew of questions about why we chose profit over protection. We are running out of time to blame it on ignorance. We know better, now more than ever, and yet we continue to take and take and take. The old growth forests that used to dominate the landscape of Eastern Kentucky are a thing of the past. With what little seral and secondary old growth we have left, every measure to ensure its protection should be our utmost priority. With the climate crisis nipping at our heels, these forests are one of our greatest assets in combating climate change.

I moved to eastern Kentucky in January of 2021 to pursue my dream of starting a flower farm. I broke ground on what would later become, Holler Home Flower Farm. The farm is located in Estill County on a 122 acre plot owned by my family. We are lucky enough to be inside the Daniel Boone National Forest and surrounded on one side by a National Forest Boundary. This property was purchased by my family with the thought in mind that at least one side of our property would be protected from exploitation because it is "National Forest" land, right?

Wrong.

Although my property is not close to this current project area near Jellico, that doesn't mean it couldn't happen in the future. When I try to picture the proposed treatments happening in MY backyard, my stomach turns to knots. Our farm is surrounded on both sides by steep slopes and slim ridgelines. Furnace Fork creek runs directly in front of my main field, a tributary that feeds Millers Creek and ultimately the Kentucky River. What would happen if a clearcut was proposed and carried out on the National Forest land behind the farm? Would we see landslides that destroy our out-buildings and equipment? Would the herbicides used flow downhill into my field, polluting my wellhouse and ultimately killing my crops? What would I do for irrigation if my well becomes contaminated, just cross my fingers and pray for rain?? What about the risk of severe flooding that could rip my parents retirement home from its foundation or send my Skoolie Tiny House on the ride of its life? I sure hope we never have to find out.

I understand the need for forest management. I understand the need for occasional human intervention to correct an environmental issue that may not be able to correct itself. However, the trend seems to be us trying to correct things because we are the ones who mess them up to begin with. When will it stop? When will we let Mother Nature do what she does best and just let her be?

I vehemently oppose the three types of clearcutting proposed in this project. I am no longer confused or distracted by the terms "deferment harvest" or "two-aged shelterwood removal" as I know they are both forms of clearcutting. These forests provides erosion and flood control. When they are removed, the water has nowhere to go. With the recent flooding in Eastern Kentucky, we should be doing everything we can to reduce this threat. Projects like this add insult to injury and the people that live there will ultimately be the ones left holding the bag.

Clearcutting opens the forest up to a slew of invasive species that if left unchecked, will dominate the landscape.

There are many areas in this region that were heavily logged in the 80s and 90s that are now taken over in mature, seeding Tree of Heaven and Autumn Olive. These invasives gained a foothold because they were not properly managed or stewarded. We do not need more of this forest lost to invasive take over. And we SURELY don't need more herbicide application to correct an invasive take-over post clearcut.

I am speaking for the farmers, landowners, homeowners, and citizens that live in this project area. I may not live here, but the realities of this project could very well be at my doorstep in the future. The Daniel Boone National Forest is a place of refuge, beauty, abundance, and adventure. I would like to see a focus on creating more recreation opportunities in this area instead of for-profit projects like this one. Rural Kentucky has been exploited for its natural resources for long enough.

"When the last tree has been cut, the last river poisoned, and the last fish caught, only then will we realize we cannot eat money."