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Comments: Since my wife, Cecelia, and I got married nearly 20 years ago, we have traveled to a lot of places and seen a lot of natural and man-made beauty from the sea stacks off the coast of Oregon and the Caribbean at sunrise, to the Outer Banks along the Atlantic Ocean and some truly picturesque little harbor towns and lighthouses along the coast of Maine, plus a lot of places in between.

These are some of the most beautiful places in the country, but so is southeastern Kentucky in the fall. When the leaves change colors, you won't find too many prettier places in the world than right here at home.

Unfortunately, this could soon be changing in parts of Whitley and McCreary counties under a United States Forestry Service proposal to log nearly 10,000 acres of land in the Jellico Mountain area, including effectively clearcutting or removing all of the trees from half of that area.

Affected neighborhoods in either Whitley or McCreary counties, include: Buck's Branch, Ryan's Creek, Jellico Creek, Jackson Creek, Little Wolf Creek, Mulberry Hollow, Emby Moses, Wolf Creek River, Kensee Hollow, Black Oak, Osborn Creek and Little Rock Creek.

Besides ruining the landscape and beauty of a large chunk of southeastern Kentucky for decades to come, this project is a bad idea for several reasons.

Much of the Jellico Mountain area has steep slopes and clearcutting the area would cause unstable soil and significant landslide risks.

It would disturb habitats for numerous animals.

Clearcut areas also require constant maintenance to prevent invasive species, such as autumn olive, tree of heaven, deadly water hemlock, knotweed and everybody's favorite, kudzu.

How will the forest service keep invasive species of plants and trees out you might ask? By spraying herbicides, not that herbicides have ever been known to cause issues. (Sarcasm greatly intended.)

Just ask some veterans about Agent Orange, which was sprayed during the Vietnam war and has caused a whole host health issues for United States military veterans and the people of Vietnam.

Don't just take my word that this logging project is a bad idea or that of environmentalists.

A number of local loggers, former loggers and family members of loggers have spoken out against this project either during a November 2022 public forum or during a public forum held last Thursday in Williamsburg.

"I find it disgusting. Clear cutting on steep slopes should be outlawed," said one person at the November 2022 meeting, who identified himself as a former logger.

During last Thursday's meeting, there were at least two loggers and another person, who comes from a family of loggers, spoke out against clearcutting Jellico Mountain.

Organizers said that the forest service politely declined an invitation to speak during Thursday's meeting.

No one present at Thursday's meeting, voiced support for logging the Jellico Mountain area.

During the November 2022 forum where forest service representatives spoke, there were nearly 100 people present and public comments lasted over an hour.

Only two people spoke out, who weren't in opposition to this project during that 2022 meeting.

The one person, who spoke out in favor of the project, identified himself as a procurement purchaser for a lumber company.

To the forest service's credit, after the November 2022 town hall meeting and the more than 300 official comments on the draft proposal, the forest service did scale back its proposed action by 261 acres to 9,798 acres. The forest service also created two alternatives.

Alternative one would involve logging only 2,937 acres over six years with effective clearcutting of 1,124 acres.

Alternative two would involve no logging at all for the area.

Can this project be stopped or at least limited to alternative one, which isn't great but is at least better than the original plan?

Maybe, but it is up to you, in part, and you are going to need to act quickly.

The United States Forestry Service now has a new comment period for its new proposed action, which ends on May 24.

If the public doesn't speak out and speak out loudly enough, we are looking at nearly 10,000 acres of Whitley and McCreary counties being logged with roughly half of that being some form of clearcutting.

Let your voice be heard. Please log onto www.fs.usda.gov/goto/dbnf/jellico, hit comment/object on project, and then fill in your information and objection to the project.

I don't ask readers to do this often, but please share this column and Trevor Sherman's story about Thursday's meeting on your social media and encourage your friends and family members to comment. I will be sharing this column among the official comments. The forest service is expected to issue its decision in October 2024 and begin logging in December 2024.