

Data Submitted (UTC 11): 5/16/2024 4:00:00 AM

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Comments: As a hunter and conservationist, I support efforts to improve the diversity of forest cover in the Daniel Boone National Forest. The Jellico Vegetation Management Project is needed to improve forest conditions for wildlife. This project is designed to create young forest habitat in the 17,000-acre project area, moving the DBNF closer to the goal set in the forest management plan. I support it.

The Jellico project area is transitioning to a mature closed canopy that already dominates over 70% of the forest. The proposed treatments will promote heterogeneity on a large scale, thus enhancing overall forest health and benefits to elk and other wildlife.

The proposed treatments will promote understory diversity and facilitate forest conditions that will improve habitat for elk and ruffed grouse. Ongoing declines in ruffed grouse over the last decade in Kentucky necessitate increased efforts to promote early seral forest conditions within the forest.

Timber harvest and intermediate vegetation treatments to set back succession within mixed-hardwood forests are critical to increase forage availability and quality for elk and white-tailed deer, especially during summer. The proposed noncommercial treatments will significantly promote regeneration and recruitment of oak species, enhancing the long-term quality of forest stand products while improving habitat for hard mast-dependent wildlife. Creating patches of timber treatments across the project area will support a mosaic of habitat conditions of varying successional stages and structural completeness, which will likely be most beneficial to elk.

I know that opposition to this project is focused on a desire to promote old growth conditions in the Jellico project area. Per Objective 1.4.B of the forest plan, the USFS shall maintain at least 8% of each old-growth type in patches of at least 300 acres in size. It should be noted that this objective has been exceeded on the Jellico Project Area with over 11% of available habitat identified as 1.I. Designated Old Growth. This project would have no impacts to Existing, Potential, or Possible Old Growth conditions as none of these habitat designations are present in the Jellico Project Area.

The construction of up to 10 miles of temporary roads to facilitate proposed harvest treatments will create linear wildlife openings while enhancing walk-in access opportunities on the forest, while improvements to general forage conditions for wildlife will enhance the experiences of all visitors and to the Stearns Ranger District. Commercial and noncommercial timber harvests will support the renewable products economy of eastern Kentucky while generating local employment opportunities.