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Comments: Concerning the Jellico Vegetation Management Project #63037, the US Forest Service should consider and respond to any adverse impact the proposed management plan will have on Neotropical migratory songbirds such as the Cerulean Warbler (Dendroica cerulea). The Cerulean Warber is a small (11.5 cm, 8-10 g) Neotropical migrant that breeds in mature, deciduous 'interior' forests throughout the eastern and Midwestern United States and winters in the Andes Mountains (Hamel 2000). An interior forest is essentially a forest within a forest, with a large buffer from any man-made structure or open natural areas. These may include clearcutting, surface mining, roads, developments, utility corridors, wetlands, etc. Interior forests provide unique nesting sites, preferred food, and an additional level of protections from outside sources for the Cerulean Warbler and other forest-dependent avian species. Forest fragmentation, loss of habitat, and the decline of interior forests such as might occur from clearcutting have been implicated as important factors contributing to declines of some forest bird populations (O'Conner et al. 1996, Sauer et al. 2008). The Cerulean Warbler has experienced a range wide decline averaging approximately 4.1% per year, which is a population reduction of 70% since 1966 (Sauer et al. 2008). Thogmartin et al. (2006) projected an 83% chance that the population will experience a 90% decrease in 100 years. Consequently, the Cerulean Warbler is considered a species of special concern over its breeding range and was recently proposed for listing as "threatened" under the Endangered Species Act. Although it was not listed (Federal Register 2006), it is still considered a focal species of research and management priority by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and other agencies. Cerulean Warbler populations reach some of their highest densities in the central Appalachians where the landscape is being heavily altered by large-scale disturbances. Forest patches adjacent to drastically disturbed lands can still support Cerulean Warblers in some cases, but habitat quality is reduced due to the loss of interior forests and edge and area affects (Weakland and Wood 2005, Wood et. al 2006). For these reasons, the US Forest Service should consider and respond to the loss of mature, interior forests in the Jellico Vegetation Management Project #63037.

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