Data Submitted (UTC 11): 5/22/2024 4:00:00 AM
First name: Eleanor
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Organization:
Title:
Comments: Re: Jellico Vegetation Management EA

I have so many concerns about this proposed project it would take an hour to outline them all. I am an environmentalist, and advocate for animals and healthy ecosystems. For decades now, the international scientific community has been warning of the importance of undisturbed forests, to the health of the planet and it's natural denizens, including humans. The best available climate science unequivocally demonstrates the importance of mature and old-growth forests for climate change mitigation. These forests act as essential carbon sinks, helping to absorb and store significant amounts of carbon dioxide from the atmosphere. By acknowledging this science, the USFS should align its practices with broader conservation objectives and contribute meaningfully to climate action efforts. Other major concerns include landslide and water quality issues, habitat destruction (particularly for migratory birds like the cerulean warbler, and the unintended introduction and management of invasive species. I URGE the FS to prioritize the protection of endangered and threatened species within the Jellico project area. This region includes a substantial portion of the designated critical habitat for the federally endangered Cumberland darter (Etheostoma susanae) and habitat for the federally threatened blackside dace (Chrosomus cumberlandensis). These species are found only in the high-quality streams of the Cumberland Plateau, making them biological jewels of Kentucky. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has highlighted that current land use practices, such as agriculture, residential development, logging, and surface coal mining, continue to impact sediment and water discharges into streams, further threatening the habitat of the blackside dace. It is crucial to protect these habitats to ensure the survival and recovery of these unique and vulnerable species.

What's most alarming is that the Daniel Boone National Forest says that this logging is needed because the forest is too old (Draft EA p.3), while the Biden administration has issued an executive order MANDATING the conservation of mature and old-growth forests! Forests have existed for millions of years on this planet, and when left alone they are self-regulating. Both the proposed action, and alternative 1 are unacceptable, and indeed this tract should be a protected area for generations to come, not a money machine for a small set of lumber interests. Every forest matters, and has a critical role in the health of our nation, and our planet, at this point in our climate crisis. The Jellico project area is no exception. Thank you for your consideration of my comment and please keep future generations in mind when you make this important decision.