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Comments: More than 50% of all hardwood trees cut down on the USA are turned into one time use pallets that are quickly discarded and throw away. This comes at the cost of our old growth forests, like the ones in the Jellico mountains. Clearcutting and shelterwood logging has no place in Kentucky. These practices pose a significant threat to the crucial role mature and old growth forests play in biodiversity, habitat preservation and climate mitigation. We have seen the impact of clearcutting forests in Eastern Kentucky with massive floods that have devastated entire communities. Logging the Jellico mountains also leaves it vulnerable to landslides, which truly needs further review before any plans for clearcutting should be considered. It's very concerning that the Forest Service is placing the timber volume mandate above other critical forest needs like protecting habitat of endangered species, overall forest health, the safety of our communities and water quality. By prioritizing timber harvesting, the agency risks undermining the well-being of our forests and the communities that rely on them. I urge the forest service to protect these old growth forests and the endangered species that live in them. This region includes a primary area of critical habitat for the federally endangered Cumberland darter and habitat for the federally threatened blackside dace. These fish are only found in the high-quality streams of the Cumberland Plateau. It is crucial to protect these habitats to ensure the survival and recovery of these unique and vulnerable species. Nearly 2 billion wooden pallets are currently in circulation in the US with a majority of them replaced each year. This consumes an estimated 50 percent of the country's annual hardwood harvest and is equivalent to 7.6 billion board feet of lumber. Why are we cutting down our old growth forests, just to throw away the hardwoods we harvest every year? It's mind boggling behavior and incredibly destructive and dangerous to our environment.

The USFS should align its practices with conservation objectives like saving endangered species, protecting habitat for public use like hiking and camping, and plan objectives that have the foresight to prevent disasters like flooding and landslides caused by clearcutting and the removal of old growth forests. It's the USFS job to protect our forests, ours streams and watersheds and our communities, not endangered them. Please do not log the Jellico Mountains.