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Organization:
Title:
Comments: Project Title: Jellico Vegetation Management EA

To Whom It May Concern:

Most of my living years have been spent in Whitley County, KY. My name is Dr. Erin Hopkins. I am a hospital-based physician who also holds a Bachelor of Science. I attended Eastern Kentucky University and commuted an hour both ways to stay in Whitley County close to family. My mother, sister, grandmother, uncle, cousins, and other various friends and family all still reside in the Corbin/Williamsburg/Jellico area.

When I first heard about this project proposal, I did my best to keep an open mind despite a visceral reaction. Ten thousand acres- that's about 7,576 football fields. Imagining that amount of area missing trees in the Daniel Boone National Forest almost brought me to tears. My first hike, my first kiss, my first camping experience- they all took place in that forest. However, I am a scientist at my core. My extensive training has not only included a solid foundation in various science subjects related to this proposal, but has also included extensive training in the importance of peer-reviewed research and a proficient understanding of the associated statistics.

I was extremely dissatisfied after reading the literature from the Forest Service about clear-cutting and its perceived benefits. I didn't read any comments from ecologists supporting this method, nor was any peer-reviewed research referenced, at least, in the documents I read produced by the Forest Service that were supposed to explain the benefits in relation to these projects occurring in multiple areas of the US. After seeing a blog post from a group that hunts one of the main species of fowl these methods are supposed to benefit being referenced, I became frustrated.

When obtaining my biology degree, ecology was the class that took multiple other subjects (such as zoology, botany, and evolutionary biology) and explained how plants, animals, fungi, and various microorganisms all have an ecological niche that can often be very delicate. If a certain species of one organism is, for example, decimated, this can affect the whole system. Often humans don't understand the devastating effects we can place on these systems until many years later.

Additionally, while reading academic articles about clear-cutting in order to make an educated decision on my view, I found multiple articles that suggested that this method is inappropriate for areas that are steep, geologically unstable, and have the potential for heavy rainfall. Doing so in these areas can cause mass soil movement and stream siltation. As you may or may not be aware, Jellico Mountain has had multiple large landslides. These have been most notable adjacent to I-75 due to the risk of human drivers in the past. However,

overall there is a significant amount of land in the DBNF that fits this description.

There are many other concerns I came across while reading these peer-reviewed articles. Multiple discussed a significant increase in surface temperature in these areas. Considering the hottest summers on record seem to be occurring yearly at this point, attenuating the temperature shifts due to climate change could have a devastating effect on the local ecosystem. Affects on soil, the watershed, and negative effects on certain species of animals have been reported.

While I acknowledge that some positive effects in certain individual parts of an ecological niche may be associated with clear-cutting, a significant amount of research, in addition to the opinion of multiple experts, are touting the opposite. National Geographic actually featured an article listing direct quotes from multiple scientists who vehemently oppose clear-cutting.

With this information so easily accessible calling these antiquated methods into question, I urge you to reconsider this project completely. The large majority of local citizens' do not wish for this project to move forward. I implore the forestry service to reconsider, and to see the whole forest rather than the individual trees involved in this decision.

Thank you for allowing those of us who are most at-home in this area to comment, and for taking our opinion into consideration.

Sincerely,

Dr. Erin Hopkins