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Comments: 1. Threat to Endangered Species

The Daniel Boone National Forest is home to numerous endangered and threatened species. Logging activities would disrupt their habitats, leading to further population declines and potentially pushing some species towards extinction. The destruction of mature forests eliminates nesting sites, food sources, and critical cover needed for these species' survival. For example, the Indiana bat and the Northern long-eared bat, both listed as endangered, rely on the old-growth forests in DBNF for roosting and foraging. Logging not only destroys their habitat but also fragments the remaining forest, making it difficult for these bats to find suitable habitats and increasing their vulnerability to predators and environmental stresses.

2. Increased Risk of Landslides

The steep terrain of the DBNF near Jellico is particularly susceptible to landslides, especially when the stabilizing effects of tree roots are removed through logging. Trees play a crucial role in maintaining soil stability; their roots bind the soil together and absorb water, reducing the likelihood of landslides. Removing these trees disrupts the soil structure, increasing the risk of landslides, which can devastate local communities, destroy habitats, and block waterways, leading to further ecological and economic damage. The increased frequency of heavy rainfall events due to climate change exacerbates this risk, making the timing of this proposal particularly ill-advised.

3. Contribution to Climate Change

Forests act as significant carbon sinks, absorbing carbon dioxide from the atmosphere and storing it in biomass and soil. Logging disrupts this process, releasing stored carbon back into the atmosphere, contributing to global warming. Additionally, the reduction in forest cover decreases the forest's capacity to sequester carbon in the future. Given the urgent need to combat climate change, it is counterproductive to reduce forest cover when we should be focusing on expanding and protecting these vital ecosystems. The logging project would not only release significant amounts of carbon dioxide but also reduce the forest's future capacity to act as a carbon sink, hindering efforts to mitigate climate change.

4. Introduction of Invasive Species

Disturbing the forest through logging opens up the landscape, making it more susceptible to the introduction and spread of invasive species. These species often outcompete native flora, leading to a decline in biodiversity. Invasive plants like the tree of heaven (*Ailanthus altissima*) and kudzu (*Pueraria montana*) thrive in disturbed areas and can quickly dominate, altering habitat structures and nutrient cycling. This change can be detrimental to native wildlife, which relies on indigenous plant species for food and shelter. Furthermore, managing invasive species is costly and labor-intensive, placing an additional burden on the already strained resources of the Forest Service and local communities.

Conclusion

The proposal to undertake a massive logging project in the DBNF near Jellico presents numerous ecological and environmental challenges. It threatens endangered species, increases the risk of landslides, exacerbates climate change, and facilitates the spread of invasive species. Protecting this forest is not only essential for maintaining biodiversity and ecological balance but also for safeguarding the health and well-being of local communities and contributing to global efforts to combat climate change. It is imperative that the US Forest Service reconsiders this proposal and prioritizes conservation and sustainable management practices over short-term economic gains from logging.