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Comments: Thank you for accepting my comments regarding the Lickstone Project in NC. I retreat regularly in the Pisgah National Forest and I believe this project poses significant threats to our natural forests, water quality, and wildlife. Many cold mountain streams, including the Middle Prong, the Right Hand Prong, Queen Creek, Big Creek, McClure Creek, and Nicks Creek, flow from Lickstone Ridge. Storm runoff from poorly designed or maintained logging roads increases sediment pollution and harms aquatic species such as Eastern Hellbenders, trout, and other important species. Road construction can also help spread non-native invasive plant species, which destroy the native habitats that sustain our native wildlife species.

I support controlled burns in the proposal to maintain high-elevation pitch pine and oak forests and their associated wildlife, as well as aquatic organism passage projects in the proposal to reconnect miles of stream for aquatic wildlife. I support the construction of a new parking lot to facilitate recreational use and access. However careful measures should be taken to prevent the spread of non-native invasive plant species due to logging and road building. Skyline logging should be done on steep slopes, and road construction on steep slopes should be avoided to mitigate landslides and erosion risks. There should be fewer trees logged in the Rich Cove Forest Ecozone. The Lickston Project exceeds the natural range of variation in Rich Cove Forests, which could lead to a loss of ecological integrity. You should remove units 50 and 52 from the timber plan. These units are diverse and in good condition; logging them would degrade these healthy Rich Cove Forests.