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Comments: To Whom It May Concern:

I am writing to express my strong support for the Red Spruce Restoration Project proposed by the U.S. Forest Service. As an ecologist, entomologist, and frequent hiker, I believe this project will serve as an excellent path toward improved forest health in our region for years to come.

Red spruce trees help to create an ecosystem that is a vital component of Appalachian biodiversity, providing habitat for numerous plant, fungal, and animal species, many of which are endemic to our range of the Appalachians. These restoration efforts, should they be funded into reality, will help re-establish this habitat by planting native Red Spruce seedlings and removing competing invasive and non-native invasive plants.

Through the establishment of these native trees, soil and water quality will subsequently improve, granting the ecosystem stability in the face of climate change-induced stressors (flooding, drought, wildfires, etc.). This in turn means a larger and more robust carbon sink, more frequent ecotourism, and improved natural resource conservation.

As a child, my family would take me on frequent trips to the Monongahela National Forest, and now as a resident beside the Washington & Jefferson National Forests, I feel a certain closeness with and dedication toward protecting these natural landscapes. They are my home. I commend the U.S. Forest Service for using science-based practices, learning from local communities, and taking time to carefully plan their actions in this restoration effort. I fully support the implementation of the Red Spruce Restoration Project.

Thank you for your time and consideration.