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First name: Elijah

Last name: Hicks

Organization:

Title:

Comments: In 2010 I moved from the concrete jungle of Cincinnati Ohio to the incredible Red River Gorge Geological area in the Daniel Boone National Forest. Such a contrast sparked a deep interest and curiosity in the biodiversity of the eastern deciduous forest.

When years later I learned that our national forests have a "multi use" clause that allows for the commercial harvesting of public forests, I was deeply concerned. Such a practice is not only anachronistic but below the dignity of the American government. Public lands, most especially public forests, are the heritage of the American people. Once they are gone, there is no way to replace a forest affected by logging. My first-hand observation of the changes of soil composition, hydrology, and the introduction of invasive species has demonstrated this fact. Time will not replace what is lost.

The value of forests is scientifically verifiable. Here are some research takeaways:

As little as 15 minutes in the woods has been demonstrated to reduce test subjects levels of cortisol, which is the human stress hormone.

More than 45 minutes of time spent in nature results in most individuals experiencing improved cognitive performance.

In England, research shows that green spaces reduce income related mental health disparities.

The sound of running water and birdsong are shown to improve mood and alertness.

Research continues to grow on tangible, translatable values of diverse forest ecosystems. In dollar value, the mental and physical impacts of diverse forest ecosystems on the public of America amounts to billions of dollars in savings.

Speaking of dollar value for America's rural economy, forests of all types offer huge potential. As the public, both national and international, becomes increasingly aware of the mental and physical benefits of time spent in forest ecosystems, there will be a growing demand for nature based experiences. What does this mean? In the coming decades there will be an increased demand for forests as a recreational location. This will translate into increased health for those in city or urban environments, and increased dollars injected into the communities surrounding the forest systems. Allowing these public lands to be logged in any way, shape or form will destroy the "golden goose." No one will visit a forest graveyard. No one will visit lands taken over by invasive species such as Autumn olive, Bradford pear, Japanese Stiltgrass, and Multiflora rose, to name a few of the plants that move into an area after logging is allowed.

In short, logging must totally halt on all public lands. There is no multi-use when forests are logged. It is a single, one-time use, that forever damages even the economic prospects of the surrounding communities. It must stop.

The Eastern Deciduous forest is an integral part of America's forest. They are part of our heritage. I recommend, along with many others, that the Eastern Deciduous forest be added to the old growth forest protection plan.

I had the incredible opportunity to spend the last year traveling the world as a 23-24 Thomas J. Watson Fellow. My project focus was ecotourism, community development, and wilderness preservation. I traveled to 85 different communities in eight countries.

Do you know what the most interesting landscapes contained? Trees. Old and ancient trees. Forests contained the most diversity and life of animals and plants.

I saw great Ficus trees in Costa Rica, Mahogany in Belize, Giant Rimu trees in New Zealand, and an ancient 2400 year old yew tree in the foothills of the Republic of Georgia.

None of these relics would have remained if the people, communities, and government had not cooperated in maintaining and protecting these incredible living relics.

The reasons for expanding protections of old growth, and all mature forests are scientific, cultural, economic, historical, and health related.

Our American trees are an invaluable gift, passed down to us from countless generations of growth. Even the forests that were logged in the last century and a half, have grown back only because of the legacy left in the soil, the carbon built up over thousands of years, the microorganisms, carefully balanced to the species, aspect, climate. The seeds and varieties of trees are adapted to suit each location. Once gone, these cannot be replaced. And once gone, so too is the potential to benefit from these forests in every conceivable way. Like the parable of killing the Golden Goose. If America's Golden Goose is undoubtedly our forests. Not just the trees, but also the incredible ecosystems, soils, fungi, animals, and symbiotic relationships. As Americans, we already killed our Golden Goose once. But by a miracle that Goose, for our own good, resurrected. Our forests are regrowing. Science will tell you, there are limits to the resurrecting Goose. Our soils are terribly strained from first culling. Further culling will lead to a final culling.

We owe it to the past generations of the American continent that stewarded these lands for thousands of years, the present generation that needs natural landscapes more than ever before, and the future generations of Americans who will forever benefit from the heritage of our incredible forest landscapes, to do everything in our power to protect our federal lands.

Thank you for your part in this.

Sincerely,

Elijah Hicks