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Comments: Christopher Thornton:

I am writing you today to object to the Buffalo Springs Restoration Project final EA. Though, I support the proposed actions of the Buffalo Springs project and recognize that they are a step in the right direction, I don't believe they go far enough fast enough to adequately address the resource concerns/threats identified within the EA. Furthermore, I adamantly oppose the "No Action" option.

The Buffalo Springs Restoration Project Draft Environmental Assessment's "Proposed Action" identifies and proposes to address several resource/ecosystem concerns. Of these resource concerns, forest health, forest age class diversity, lack of young forests, and restoring the oak-hickory ecosystem should be of the utmost priority. If nothing is done immediately to address these resource concerns, the oak-hickory ecosystem and forest wildlife dependent on the oak-hickory ecosystem and in particular disturbance dependent forest wildlife will likely be critically imperiled with no reasonable expectation of restoration/recovery in the future. One of many examples of this is the ruffed grouse, which was listed as State Endangered by the state of Indiana in 2020. Wildlife experts largely accept the loss of young forests at a landscape level as the most significant contributor to the population declines of ruffed grouse and other disturbance dependent wildlife. The project area currently only contains 8 acres of young forest (0-9 years old) or .05%. This is simply unacceptable and as result the Buffalo Springs Restoration Project area, let alone the entire Hoosier National Forest, in its' current condition, is unsuitable wildlife habitat for forest wildlife dependent on young forests.

The "Proposed Action" includes the creation of 707 acres of clearcuts to remove non-native pine stands and temporarily create 707 acres of young forests or 4.5% of the project area. The 2006 Hoosier National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan sets a forest wide acreage goal of 4%-12% young forest. Due to the timeline of implementation, the "Proposed Action" will more than likely not establish 4%-12% of young forests in the project area and does little to address the forest wide goals. This is inadequate to address the population declines of forest wildlife that are dependent on young forests, forest disturbance, balanced age class diversity, and the oak-hickory ecosystem.

I applaud the USFS and the HNF staff for recognizing the resource concerns outlined in the Buffalo Springs Restoration Project Environmental Assessment and for proposing actions to begin to address those resource concerns. Unfortunately, the actions proposed in the supplement are not intense nor immediate enough create enough disturbance to address the population declines of forest wildlife that are dependent on young forests, forest disturbance, balanced age class diversity, and the oak-hickory ecosystem. I suggest that more intensive and immediate management actions be taken than what are proposed in the EA in order to adequately promote young forests and the oak hickory ecosystem within the project area and across the entire HNF. I'm eager to at the very least see full implementation of this project. I greatly appreciate the robust opportunities for public comment which have allowed me abundant opportunities to provide my input in the process. I'm also eager to provide further input on the project as it moves forward.

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