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First name: Susan

Last name: Crotts

Organization:

Title:

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Susan Crotts

Draft Environmental Assessment Response to GAP_AOI_ID = GRF23 & GRF24

In this AOI the purpose and need for prescribed burning in this area, particularly with the Gingercake Acres WUI to the north, fails to consider the dangerous health impacts of smoke from burning on the residents of Gingercake Acres and Upper Creek Acres as well as residents up to Linville Falls above the Linville Gorge. Forest fire smoke is highly toxic, particularly to unborn children, elderly and immunocompromised individuals.

In the EA process for the 2009 Grandfather CFLRP, the US Forest Service received extensive documentation on this from me, some from their own training guidance, during the 2009 Grandfather CFLRP EA process and subsequent forest plan. Apparently forest fire health impact information is not part of the current decision-making criteria, but it needs to be. My 25 page scoping letter for the 2009 Grandfather CFLRP is attached for reference to an initial lack of inclusion in that public engagement process and to reasons that proposal was objectionable, quite a few of which will apply in this case.

Smoke from burns has been a health issue here before. During the Table Rock fire backburn, my neighbor had to evacuate her cabin due to the amount of smoke that entered it. Shortly after that Greg Philip of the US Forest Service knocked on my door and told me they might have to evacuate us. My neighbor became very ill the very day the smoke bombarded his home on the face of the mountain that took the brunt of the smoke. He died within a few days. I discussed these issues with the Forest Service and at the time and they expressed what appeared to be real concern, but that was apparently temporary.

From my limited time to view the Draft Environmental Assessment today, it is unclear, needs further work and needs to include the people who will be impacted health wise and via recreational tourism impacts on the economy. I am quite certain that most residents in these neighborhoods and other communities below, around and above the Linville Gorge are unaware of the proposal to burn in the areas defined in this proposal. Publishing public notices in the Asheville Citizen Times was inadequate and non-inclusive for Burke County residents, who read the Morganton based News Herald newspaper for public notices and news articles.

Furthermore, there is substantial new evidence regarding forest burning that needs to be considered in this Environmental Assessment process.

I object to the non-inclusive public participation process and request that the Forest Service make a deliberate effort to include all communities in the areas of proposed burning, who will be impacted, in the scoping and EA processes by reopening the scoping period and extending the EA comments to allow impacted citizens to participate.

Please let me know your decision on the extension of the scoping and EA processes.

Thank you,

Susan "Sue" Crotts

cc: Matt Peters, Heartwood.org