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COMMENT ON NC FOREST PLAN

Dear Forest Service:

I was dismayed to learn that the NC Forest Plan increases the land that will be logged in the new Forest Plan. I am an avid hiker in these areas and as a partial owner of these lands I would instead recommend the following:

Designate all hiking areas as not suitable for timber production, timber harvest, and road building, and maintain their natural character. Also, place old growth forests and old growth forest designations from the last Forest Plan in management areas unsuitable for timber production, timber harvest, and road building.

When calculating the economic benefits of recreation, include the impact of the large number of hikers who choose to relocate or purchase second homes in western NC or to visit western NC to enjoy the hiking opportunities of our forests. Hikers are the largest group of recreation users, and trail management should reflect this economic benefit. Hikers? use the forest trails as visitors, as individuals and families, in church hiking groups, as groups in residential developments through e-mail lists and in a wide variety of organized hiking groups throughout the Western North Carolina region.

Designate hiking lands through which hiking trails pass as Backcountry and are therefore unsuitable for timber production.

Not only is Western North Carolina one of the most diverse ecological areas on the planet it is home to many animal, reptile, amphibian and plant species which would be destroyed and lost due to increased logging activity as their habitat would no longer exist. Furthermore, in addition to lost recreational revenue which is why so many people come to visit and live in the region, important watersheds would be lost or destroyed reducing the availability of clean water to a population that is growing in the region. Increased logging would create erosion and landslide problems. Without trees the supply of oxygen on our planet will be reduced significantly as trees convert carbon dioxide into oxygen and filter out many other harmful pollutants from our air. This at a time when global warming is becoming a greater and greater threat to our existence we need more trees not less trees to reduce our carbon footprint on our planet.

Hopefully,

John Ray

Georgia Bartram Trail Group