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Summer Building Blocks

I respectfully request the Forest Service recommend to Congress that the Terrapin Mountain area in North Carolina be designated as protected Wilderness.

The conclusion reached in the "Evaluation of Areas that may be Suitable for Inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System" regarding the Terrapin Mountain area in North Carolina does not seem supported by the facts.

I am a seasonal resident in the subject area, and I have not had an opportunity to participate in any of the public forums.

It is my understanding the pertinent criteria used in the analysis to evaluate the area are as follows:

1. Topography and Vegetation. The analysis reads in part: "With an elevation of 4,400 feet, Terrapin Mountain is the highest peak in the area. Near the center of the area, precipitous rock faces, ranging from 500 to 800 feet, form a prominent rock-sided haystack. Fowler Creek originates near the southeastern portion of the area and forms an inaccessible, remote and isolated u-shaped amphitheater of rock cliffs."

"The area's rugged landscape and steep slopes include rare habitats such as high elevation granitic domes, montane acidic cliffs, high elevation seeps, and low elevation granitic domes. Other natural communities in the area include heath balds, montane oak-hickory, pine oak heaths, rich cove forests, and acidic cove forests.

2. Apparent Naturalness. The analysis reads in part: "The Terrapin Mountain area has a natural appearance with most of the forest in second growth; the result of logging that occurred in the early 1900s. Old logging roads approach the summit of Terrapin Mountain but are not currently maintained and have become overgrown."

3. Opportunities for Solitude or Primitive & Unconfined Recreation. The analysis reads in part: "The Terrapin Mountain area provides opportunities for solitude and unconfined recreation, particularly in the area around Terrapin Mountain. At lower elevations, sights and sounds of civilization do not impact solitude. The topography of the area's boundaries, which include high mountaintops, hide views of civilization."

4. Other Values - Unique or Outstanding Qualities. The analysis reads in part: "The Chattooga Cliffs provide a unique scenic attraction along the Chattooga Wild and Scenic River. There are rare plant communities present as well as high quality waters that support diverse aquatic communities."

5. Size & Manageability. The analysis reads in part: "The Terrapin Mountain area is highly irregularly shaped, with boundaries that follow a combination of roads and Forest Service ownership. Much of the northern boundary is adjacent to non-federal ownership with several residences just north of the area. There are ten private inholdings within the outer boundary of Forest Service ownership for this area, nine of which have been excluded from the area of consideration..."

5. Conclusion. The analysis reads in part: "Overall, the Terrapin Mountain area does not have wilderness characteristics."

Important criteria that support inclusion of the Terrapin Mountain area as protected Wilderness are as follows:

1. The topography includes "the highest peak in the area" with multiple unique features and rare vegetation as referenced above. Among the rare vegetation is *Rhododendron Vaseyi* (Pink Shell Azalea).
2. The apparent naturalness is supported by the fact that the "core of the Terrapin Mountain area is generally free from recent vegetation management and has opportunities for primitive and unconfined recreation." In fact, timbering has not occurred for more than 100 years.
3. The area has abundant opportunities for solitude and unconfined recreation as described above.
4. Other values include this area being "a unique scenic attraction" with "rare plant communities" and "high quality waters that support diverse aquatic communities." In fact, the slopes of Terrapin Mountain feed the Chattooga River, a federally protected "Wild and Scenic" river with priority above timbering.
5. With more than 5,400 acres, the size requirements are met.
6. In summation, Terrapin Mountain is a pristine and exceedingly scenic area that abuts the Ellicot Rock Wilderness with which it can connect to create a remarkable wildlife corridor that should be included for Wilderness recommendation. For all of these reasons, I request the Forest Service revisit its preliminary conclusion. Thank you for your consideration.

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