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Protect ALL of Big Ivy! Please!

Dear Allen Nicholas, Matt McCombs, Michelle Aldridge, and the Forest Service Planning Team,

The most recent preliminary draft of forest plan materials leaves much of Big Ivy unprotected, including the 1,000 acres of old-growth forest on Coxcomb Mountain and Snowball Mountain. The vague, undefined Special Interest Area also does not adequately protect Big Ivy's forests and watersheds. Please protect ALL of Big Ivy:

1. Designate Big Ivy's trail-less, high-elevation forests as wilderness as recommended by the Buncombe County Board of commissioners.
2. Designate Big Ivy's trail network and the old-growth forests of Coxcomb Mountain and Snowball Mountain as backcountry.

Here are a few reasons why Big Ivy deserves wilderness and backcountry protections:

RECREATION: Big Ivy is one of the most popular and ecologically important recreation destinations in Southern Appalachia, with prized trout streams, waterfalls, swimming holes, rugged trails, and scenic overlooks that attract tens of thousands of outdoor enthusiasts annually.

OLD GROWTH: Big Ivy contains over 3,000 acres of old-growth forest-one of the largest old-growth forests in the East.

CLEAN WATER: Big Ivy's pristine headwaters are home to native trout and part of the protected watershed of the Ivy River, an important tributary of the French Broad and drinking water source for the cities of Weaverville, Mars Hill, and surrounding communities.

RARE SPECIES: Big Ivy's wild forests shelter at least 44 rare plant and animal species, and the North Carolina Natural Heritage Program has identified over 3,000 acres of Big Ivy for highest priority protection. Big Ivy has been highlighted by The Nature Conservancy as one of the most important core forests in the Southern Blue Ridge.

VIEWSHEDS: Big Ivy is the most photographed spot along the Blue Ridge Parkway. Big Ivy is the forest that spans the vista from Craggy Gardens Visitor Center, one of the most visited tourist destinations in the East.

100,000-ACRE BLOCK OF WILDLANDS: Big Ivy offers some of the best opportunities for primitive recreation and solitude in Buncombe County and throughout the Pisgah National Forest with rugged, remote peaks and ridges that are surrounded by 100,000 acres of contiguous wildlands, making Big Ivy an ideal location for wilderness.

WILDERNESS: Buncombe County currently has no wilderness areas, and the Big Ivy/Craggy Wilderness area would be the closest wilderness area to Asheville; meanwhile, Haywood County, Jackson County, Macon County, Clay County, Graham County, and Burke County all have federally designated wilderness areas that

are major drivers of outdoor recreation and tourism both regionally and nationally.

HERITAGE: Locals have used Big Ivy to hunt, fish, hike, camp, and swim for over two centuries. Wilderness and backcountry designations for Big Ivy will safeguard traditional local uses of the land.

PROPERTY VALUES: The scenic vistas and intact, unbroken forests of Big Ivy are prized vistas that enhance local property values and support local businesses.

PUBLIC SUPPORT: The Big Ivy community, have overwhelmingly supported an expanded Big Ivy wilderness in public hearings and community meetings. Over 300 people attended a community meeting with the U.S. Forest Service to voice support for protecting Big Ivy's forest. Another 150 attended the Buncombe County Commissioners Meeting to unanimously support wilderness protection for Big Ivy.

POLITICAL SUPPORT: An expanded Big Ivy/Craggy Wilderness has already been unanimously supported by the Buncombe County Commissioners.

BUSINESS SUPPORT: Big Ivy's expansion of wilderness and protection of its backcountry trail network are supported by a broad coalition of over 40 local, regional, and national organizations and Asheville-based businesses.

SCIENTIFIC SUPPORT: Former U.S. Forest Service biologists, university biologists, and Nobel Prize-winning scientists have publicly and unanimously supported permanent protection of Big Ivy's forests.

Thank you for all of your work to help protect Big Ivy and the forests of the Pisgah-Nantahala.

Sincerely,