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I am originally from Hendersonville, NC, and I have lived in North Carolina for the entirety of my life. I grew up swimming in the Davidson River and camping in Pisgah National Forest. I have always been an avid hiker backpacker, mountain biker, and I have recently added fly fishing to my ever-growing list of outdoor passions. I recently read an article in the magazine Blue Ridge Outdoors titled "Your 1 Million Acres: The Future of Pisgah-Nantahala National Forest Belongs to You" by Will Harlan. I found the article to be a bit disturbing for a couple of different reasons.

Admittedly, I have not read the full Forest Service plan as it relates to Pisgah, but it sounds as if the Forest Service values our forest as consumable resource much more than as a recreational and spiritual resource for millions of visitors every year. I understand, and agree, that there is a place for logging, as timber is a part of our everyday lives, but is the demand for timber increasing? According to the article, The Forest Service is proposing logging 4,000 acres per year, which is a 500% increase over current levels. Why such a large increase? The article also suggests that 97% of timber production in the South comes from private property. This makes sense to me. Why can't timber production be fully supported by private property? Timber is essentially a crop that's harvested and sold for a profit by logging companies. We don't open up our forests for cattle farming or any other type of farming.

Some argue that increased logging would increase jobs in rural communities. This could be true, but for how long and at what cost? I would argue that the recreational industry is a much more sustainable and renewable source of employment for rural communities. For those communities that already have established outdoor and recreational industries, won't logging only serve to jeopardize them? If the underlying motivation is to create job growth, I think there are better ways to achieve this without jeopardizing our natural resources.

There is an argument from hunters that additional logging is needed to create early successional habitats for deer, turkey and grouse. Are the naturally occurring wildfires not creating enough early successional habitats for hunters? How much is The Forest Service spending each year to curtail Mother Nature's production of early successional habitats? It has been argued that hunters pay additional taxes and fees through hunting licenses and ammunition sales, but these hunters only comprise an estimated 3% of total users of the forest. How much tax revenue is generated by the millions of hikers, backpackers, mountain bikers and fisherman? How much additional tax revenue is generated by recreational users of the forest through gas taxes, hotel taxes, sales taxes and general support of local recreational industry? Every year I pay for a fishing license and an additional fee for a trout license, and I prefer fishing pristine mountain streams among old-growth forests. Fishing a dirty, polluted river that no longer supports trout along a tract of forest that's been clear-cut doesn't sound quite as appealing.

As long as we're planning to expand logging, let's make sure capturing the complete cost of these activities. How many taxpayer dollars have been spent in an effort to repair and restore our forests from the damage caused by logging historically? How many miles of native brook trout habitat have been lost due to logging and its wake of destruction? It is certainly significant. Recreation has the potential to provide a better return on investment. Logging is costly in more ways than one.

What I found most disturbing is the list of places included on the proposal: Wilson Creek, Panthertown Valley, Big Ivy, Tellico Bald, Upper Santeetlah, Siler Bald, just to name a handful. This list includes some of the best places I know of to hike, fish and get lost in the beauty of the forest. Regardless of what price timber is fetching in the market, let's do everything we can to avoid building unnecessary roads and logging our priceless lands that we all share. There are other sources of timber, but we are running out of wild and remote places that nourish our souls.

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Craig Carter