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Organization:

Title:

Comments:

Dear Supervisor Jewett,

Several of the wildest places left in North Georgia lie within the areas that are included in the Foothills Landscape Project. These areas are important resources and should be protected and not be subject to intensive timbering and new roadbuilding. As an adjacent property owner, I am very concerned about the scope, methods used, lack of public input, and length of this plan.

This area provides habitat for wildlife, protects valuable freshwater resources and endangered species, and provides corridors for innumerable species to move from place to place, which we know will become even more critical as the climate crisis and its impacts on wildlife and natural resources increases.

What I want to talk about, though, is what they mean to me. As the child of longtime property owner of a working family farm in Union County, I have spent decades watching forest management change the character of the Chattahoochee National Forest. I vividly recall the clearcutting done in the 1970s and can still see those obvious areas along Duncan Ridge and others that have grown up in white pine and have not naturally regenerated into mature forests. I have seen the devastating effects of the Hemlock die-off due to the hemlock woolly adelgid and worry about its effects on trout streams, hellbenders and other aquatic species, and the sedimentation of streams. I have seen no studies on how that vital and historic habitat loss is being taken into consideration in the Foothills Project or the timbering plan in Cooper Creek. It is this lack of comprehensive, big-picture study and consideration in modifying and adjusting standard forest management practices that most concerns me. Please don't harvest trees in our roadless areas. Surely there are better places than our roadless areas to cut trees and have big machines drag them through the woods. The places that are scraped off to load the logs onto the trucks are even worse and will take generations to regenerate. I own the family farm now and continue to see and use the adjacent National Forest lands that increase my property's value and beauty. I want my daughter and her children to experience the natural beauty and species diversity in these precious forests. I want them to be able to fish along Cooper Creek, bushwhack through old growth trees, seek out old homeplaces (my grandfather was born at the old homestead at the Cooper Creek Campground), discover bubbling springs, and get lost on the steep mountainsides just as I did in my younger days.

Illegal activities by jeep clubs and ORVs currently wreak havoc on dirt roads and trails in the Chattahoochee National Forest. With its budget cuts, the USFS does not seem to have the resources to monitor and manage these activities or do a good job of maintaining existing roads. Building more roads, as proposed in the Foothills Project, will only increase these illegal uses and cause more damage to streams. Please don't make new roads in our roadless areas. The document you provided to describe the project says roads dump more sediment into streams than any other management activity. Even "temporary" roads disrupt water flow and can turn into raw gashes that pollute our streams.

The Foothills are a place of adventure, peace, and beauty, but there are only a few places left where it hasn't been cut into bite-sized pieces. Less than a quarter-of-one-percent of the Foothills is Wilderness. None of the Foothills is designated remote backcountry. These Mountain Treasures are unique, and they should be protected. That's why the remaining roadless areas in the Foothills are so important to me. They are our absolute best chance to have really clean water anywhere in the Foothills.

Please don't use any herbicides in our roadless area. There seems to be more bad news about them every day. We can't count on them to stay out of the water, and who knows what's really in some of them. Surely you can find some way to manage the forest without resorting to spraying herbicides. National Forests should be kept as natural as possible and the broad use of herbicides is not how they should be managed. Extreme caution should be taken when controlling invasive species with chemical substances in order to protect our diverse plant communities and be applied only in small areas by hand.

Controlled burns are an important part of forest management and should be conducted with care on a regularly scheduled basis. What I have seen in the Chattahoochee National Forest are experimental projects that have destroyed diverse hardwood/pine mixed forests to create new habitat (Brawley Mountain comes to mind). Now

that this vast area has been timbered, there appears to be a lack of funds or manpower to properly manage it. It is growing up in many species of undesirable trees and shrubs and is becoming a mass of tangled overgrowth. It is not regenerating into a forest nor is it being properly managed for the migrating and nesting birds it was created for. Even though many educated, experienced people submitted comments cautioning the USFS during the planning process of this project, they fell on deaf ears and now Brawley Mountain is damaged and not properly managed. I do not want a 20-year Foothills Landscape Project, with its absence of public input, to result in an even larger degradation of our public lands in North Georgia.

I also visit many places in the Chattahoochee National Forest that suffer from budget cuts and are not being maintained well for recreational users. Dockery Lake used to be a beautiful recreational area. The last time I visited, the day use picnic area was all but unusable. Trees were down, grass was unmown, the public toilet was dirty and unkept, there was a pile of brush next to it that had never been hauled away, the picnic tables were in knee-high grass and the gravel road was washed out. Perhaps the Forest Service should concentrate on maintaining its existing facilities and not engage in creating even more roads and timbered areas that require its limited management dollars. Our public lands are important to citizens and, with its close proximity to Metro Atlanta, our National Forest is used and enjoyed by thousands each year. I hope the USFS will consider placing more attention and resources on making our trails, campgrounds, and recreation areas safe and beautiful for legal uses, protects them from illegal uses, and focuses on current facilities and resources. Please reconsider the pursuit of the Foothills Landscape Project which will impact so much of our National Forest and its roadless areas and focus instead on making it a wonderfully maintained and modern resource that can be enjoyed by the people who recreate there.

These places mean something to me and millions of other Georgians. Please let them be.

Sincerely,  
Phyllis Bowen