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US Forest Service  
Ozark-St. Francis National Forest  
Big Piney District

District Ranger Jones:

This is a submission of public comment for the Environmental Assessment for the Robert's Gap project.

The US Forest Service, Ozark-St. Francis National Forest, Big Piney Ranger District has announced its proposals, has received letters during the scoping period and now is ready to draft the Environmental Assessment for the Robert's Gap project. These proposals cover some of the favorite hiking, canoeing, fishing, birding, photography places in Northwest Arkansas, think Hawk's Bill, Buffalo River, the Mountain Bike Trails off Hwy 16 on Cave Mountain.

First, of all, my family lives on Cave Mountain, Cave Mountain Road in Newton County, a few miles from the Robert's Gap project. What you do to Robert's Gap will affect me and mine directly. Following, I will discuss several aspects of the Project and how I see them affecting our well being.

Roadside Vegetation Management: the proposal is to spray herbicides for invasive species along all roads in US Forest Service lands. This can be done on newly bulldozed logging roads as well as county roads that face US Forest Service land. Monsanto's glyphosate/Round-Up, sold world-wide, is one of the chemicals proposed. That herbicide is believed to be carcinogenic and cause many of the chronic diseases we suffer from today. Weeds have become resistant to it, soil bacteria die from its use and soil becomes sterile. Big Ag has gotten on a chemical dependent treadmill with its use of multiple chemical supplements, causing what some call a "chemical soup" in our wild and agricultural lands.

Besides Glyphosate, which has caused multiple lawsuits against the new owner, the huge German chemical company Bayer, Trichlocyr is worse. You can't get it on your skin or it causes rash. Imagine if my dogs run into weeds freshly treated with it and come home with wet fur and I think it's simply water, it will cause rash on me or the skin of a family member.

We who live on Cave Mountain have our own water supplies, either a well or a spring. We have a spring and because of the karst topography of the

Ozarks, those above-mentioned toxins can go sideways into the water table and affect my drinking water and that of my livestock.

The use of these toxins also affects the bats of Bat Cave near the base of Cave Mountain. It can kill the insects that they feed on, kill the plants those insects live on affecting the sequential phenology of the insects causing the bats to not have food at the appropriate time. Supposedly, these bats are a protected species.

Robert's Gap, directly next to the Upper Buffalo Wilderness, covers 56,000 plus acres of which 16,000 acres are proposed for prescribed burning. There is precedence since the 1990's for prescribed burns, but nesting birds and slow moving animals are killed, soil structure can be damaged, food for endangered bats and migrating tropical song birds die and smoke inhalation for all inhabitants in the area is a problem. The whole of the Buffalo River Watershed is affected. Many of us have complained about these burns in the past as causing problems for those with respiratory problem. And now that the Covid 19 pandemic is here and we don't know when it will be over, respiratory concerns are one of its major symptoms. US Forest Service burns should not be implemented for multiple reasons.

Another destructive consequence of the Robert's Gap project is the harvest of near-old growth hardwood trees. Robert's Gap project will allow timber harvest of near old-growth trees, lessening the diversity of the forests and isolating them into fragmented areas disrupting animal movement. These mature trees are the regenerators for future forests, their root systems are a supportive community for the understory saplings. Harvesting these trees is profitable for the timber industry but not for wildlife, endangered species nor for people. It appears the intention is to turn our woods into a managed tree farm, not the wilderness that was the US Forest Service mandate to manage our forests for recreation, wildlife, hunting, grassland, watershed protection and timber. Finally, deforestation is a leading cause for the build up of excess CO<sub>2</sub> in the atmosphere causing climate change.

Additionally, relative to timber harvest, the Forest Service will bulldoze roads into the area adding to the sediment load in the Upper Buffalo Wilderness. Many of us working on this EA have been in touch with other groups regional to our southern forests. Kentucky Hardwoods and the Dogwood Alliance have had similar concerns with the National Forest in their area. Another consequence of these logging roads is erosion and

eventual collapse of hillsides, in this case, possibly into the Upper Buffalo, again affecting the whole watershed.

Another concern I have is the road system here on Cave Mountain. This is a narrow dirt road, 15 miles between Hwy 16 at Red Star and Boxley Valley on Hwy. 21. Giant logging trucks will ruin our road and make it unsafe to travel down the steep slope that leads to Boxley. At that base of the Mountain is Bat Cave, the logging truck will be within 30 feet of the cave entrance, yet another danger for the bats that are supposedly a protected species. It seems to me that the Forest Service is more interested in money than the protection of all who live here, animal, plant, people.

Thank you for taking the time to read my letter of public comment. I will also send this letter hard copy by priority mail and yet another way by copying so you have my personal signature which I understand you would not accept the letter otherwise.

Sincerely,

Lolly Tindol, Resident and landowner on Cave Mountain a few miles from Robert's Gap

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