

Southern Appalachian National Forest Stakeholders

June 12, 2017

Director Mick Mulvaney
Office of Management and Budget
725 17th St. NW
Washington, D.C. 20503
Submitted electronically via regulations.gov

Re: Notice of Request for Comment on Government-wide Reform

Dear Director Mulvaney,

The undersigned stakeholders represent a broad range of interests in public lands in the Southern Appalachians. We are sportsmen, purchasers of forest products, environmental conservation groups, recreation users and businesses, youth camps, tribal leaders, watershed protection groups, and local governments. In response to your request for comments under Executive Order 13781, **we strongly urge you to maintain and strengthen the vital functions and programs of the U.S. Forest Service (USFS)**, which manages several million acres of public lands in our region.

Within easy driving distance from many major population centers, the National Forests of the Southern Appalachians receive millions of visitors each year and provide clean drinking water to millions more downstream, anchoring our local economies, culture, and quality of life. The work of federal land managers--maintaining trails and roads, providing habitat for wildlife, restoring healthy forests and watersheds, stewarding existing wilderness, and planning for the future--is critical to our communities, members, and constituencies.

The Federal Register notice requesting comments on Executive Order 13781 asks the public to weigh in on which agencies and functions should be eliminated, transferred to non-federal entities, or modified, and in particular to comment on those with poor cost/benefit ratios.

As a diverse group of stakeholders, one thing we all heartily agree on is that public lands are among the country's smartest investments, providing incredible value at low cost to taxpayers. The Forest Service receives just a tiny fraction of the federal budget, but the economic benefit of our national forests is enormous. In addition to clean water and other ecosystem services, they support diverse economies from local to national scales, including an outdoor

recreation industry that contributes nearly \$900 billion and 7.6 million jobs to the American economy--\$90 billion and 1 million jobs in our region alone. With consistently high visitor satisfaction scores, we might be so bold as to say that no other federal agency function creates such a strong sense that the public is getting its money's worth.

Not only do federal lands provide great value for the public, but they also do it with increasing efficiency and accountability. As budgets have been stretched by maintenance backlogs and firefighting needs, federal land managers have responded with innovative collaborative approaches to reduce friction, increase partner investment, and produce scaled management projects. These efforts have also created enhanced transparency and trust between the government and the public. Many of us have served as stakeholders in these processes, and we believe improved efficiency comes from working together locally, from the ground up. We have already seen remarkable improvements firsthand, and we hope you will help us build on those successes.

Despite heroic efforts to do more with less, many Forest Service functions are strained to their limits. Further cuts to USFS programs will directly harm the communities and economies that are connected to our forests. We therefore encourage you to support the vital functions that support our communities:

- Protecting clean water;
- Creating local jobs, from timber and forest products to recreation and tourism;
- Managing wildlife habitat and fisheries;
- Managing fire and protecting forest neighbors;
- Maintaining infrastructure and addressing legacy roads and trails;
- Working cooperatively with State and Tribal governments and private landowners;
- Stewarding trails, wilderness, and cultural resources;
- Law enforcement;
- Land and resource planning, assessment, and monitoring; and
- The Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program.

In addition, to the extent that you recommend organizational changes, we suggest that you prioritize the following:

- A fire funding mechanism that halts the erosion of other programs due to increasing suppression costs, provides for emergency funding, and does not require "borrowing" from other discretionary funds.
- Additional staff and resources to support and expand innovative collaborative solutions to reduce conflict and produce the best projects possible, and to assist line officers in transitioning to a culture of collaborative, integrated project development.
- Resources to address deferred maintenance needs in collaboration with stakeholders and state and local authorities in order to meet needs for resource management, water quality, recreation, and traditional and cultural uses.

Thank you for considering these comments. Sincerely,

Southern Appalachian National Forest Stakeholders

Access Fund Zachary Lesch-Huie, Southeast Regional Director National	Alabama Rivers Alliance Cindy Lowry, Executive Director Alabama
American Whitewater Kevin Colburn, National Stewardship Director National	Appalachian Voices Thom Kay, Senior Legislative Representative North Carolina and Virginia
Atlanta Audubon Society Nikki Belmonte, Executive Director Georgia	Audubon North Carolina Curtis Smalling, Director of Conservation North Carolina
Backcountry Horsemen of North Carolina Deirdre Lightsey North Carolina	Carolina Mountain Club Barbara Morgan, President North Carolina
North Carolina Resource Conservation and Development Melissa Patton, Carolina Land and Lakes RC&D North Carolina	Chattahoochee Riverkeeper Juliet Cohen, Executive Director Georgia
Chattooga Conservancy Nicole Hayler, Executive Director Georgia	Cherokee Forest Voices Catherine Murray, Cherokee Forest Voices Tennessee
Defenders of Wildlife Ben Prater, Southeastern Program Director National	Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians Joey Owle, Secretary of Agriculture Sovereign
Environment Georgia Jennette Gayer, Director Georgia	French Broad Riverkeeper Hartwell Carson North Carolina
Friends of Shenandoah Mountain Lynn Cameron, Co-Chair Virginia	Georgia Bartram Trail Society John Ray Georgia
Georgia Conservancy Robert Ramsay, President Georgia	Georgia ForestWatch, Georgia Mary Topa, Ph.D., Executive Director Georgia
Graham County (NC 11th District) Sophia Paulos, Economic Development Director Graham County, North Carolina	Hiwassee River Watershed Coalition, North Carolina Callie Moore, Executive Director North Carolina and Georgia
Mountain High Hikers Richard Sullivan, President Georgia	MountainTrue Julie Mayfield North Carolina
National Parks Conservation Association Jeffrey Hunter, Southeast Region Prog. Mgr. National	North Carolina Sierra Club Judy Mattox, Chair Wenoca Group North Carolina

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North Carolina Trout Unlimited John Rich North Carolina	North Carolina High Peaks Trail Association Jake Blood, Board Member North Carolina
North Carolina Wildlife Federation Tim Gestwicki North Carolina	North Carolina Youth Camp Association Maggie Howe North Carolina
Partners of Joyce Kilmer-Slickrock Wilderness Richard Evans, President North Carolina	Potomac Riverkeeper Dean Naujoks Virginia and Washington DC
Potomac Riverkeeper Network Jeff Kelble, President Virginia and Washington DC	Root Cause Local Forest Products Lang Hornthal North Carolina
Shenandoah Riverkeeper Mark Frondorf Virginia	Shenandoah Valley Network Kate Wofford, Executive Director Virginia
Southern Appalachian Mineral Society Ken Casebeer North Carolina	Southern Appalachian Mountain Stewards Annie Jane Cotten Virginia
Southern Appalachian Wilderness Stewards Bill Hodge, Executive Director Southeast	Southern Environmental Law Center Sam Evans, Nat'l Parks & Forests Prog. Leader Southeast
Southern Off Road Bicycle Association Tom Sauret, Executive Director Southeast	SouthWings Hume Davenport, Executive Director Southeast
Tennessee Citizens for Wilderness Planning Sandra Goss, Executive Director Tennessee	The Clinch Coalition Diana Withen, President Virginia
The Orienne Society Chris Jenkins, Ph.D., CEO Georgia	The Wilderness Society Jill Gottesman, S. Appalachian Cons. Specialist National
Upper Potomac Riverkeeper Brent Walls Virginia and Washington DC	Virginia Wilderness Committee, Virginia Mark Miller, Executive Director Virginia
Watauga Riverkeeper Andy Hill North Carolina	Watauga Watershed Alliance, Tennessee Gloria Griffith Tennessee
Wild South Kevin Massey, Executive Director Southeast	

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cc: The Honorable Sonny Perdue
Secretary of the U.S. Department of Agriculture

Enclosure: Southern Appalachian National Forest Facts