

Shalonda Guy, District Ranger

1523 Hwy 270 East

Mt. Ida, AR 71957

August 11, 2016

Dear Ranger Guy,

I have received the scoping letter concerning the Gap Creek Project and would like to take this opportunity to provide input on this project.

(Reference File Code 1950/2400 July 29, 2016)

I have been involved with volunteer work building and maintaining trails in cooperation with the United States Forest Service for many years. I worked with the Kisatchie District in Louisiana while I lived there and have been working on trails in the Ouachita District (Lake Ouachita Vista Trail, the Womble Trail, and the Ouachita National Recreational Trail) since moving to this area in 2007. I am one of the many volunteers (the Traildogs) who have provided over 11,000 volunteers hours working on the Lake Ouachita Vista Trail.

The years I have spent working on trails in the forest have clearly shown me the recreational and economic impact that a good trail system can have on the surrounding area. The impact that the LOVIT has had is a prime example of this. You may be aware that the LOVIT has been designated an "Epic Trail" by the International Mountain Biking

Association. It is one of three IMBA Epic Trails that are wholly or partly in Montgomery County. As an Epic Trail, the LOVIT is recognized internationally by mountain bikers and hikers. Asking any one of the local resort owners what impact this epic trail has made on their business will give an idea of what a great trail can do for the tourist industry.

The scoping letter provides some information on a variety of elements in the Gap Creek area. While I am sure these have been well thought out by USFS personnel, I want to caution you particularly regarding one of these elements. Cutting, thinning, or otherwise damaging the timber corridor along the LOVIT will have a negative impact on the trail. First of all, the beauty of the LOVIT will be hurt by cutting trees in close proximity to the trail. Secondly, any reduction in the number of trees providing canopy to the trail will result in increased growth of weeds, briars, and bushes that encroach upon the trail. This leads to increased maintenance problems for those volunteers providing upkeep along the trail. I am sure any of the Traildogs can show you and your staff many examples of places where removal of the canopy has caused long term problems for the trail.

I strongly suggest you commit to leaving a corridor of undisturbed trees on both sides of the trail to maintain the beauty of the trail and reduce undesirable growth of weeds, briars, and brush in the trail. This corridor should extend a minimum of 200 feet each side of the trail. The decrease of the amount of available lumber maintaining this corridor will cause pales in significance compared to the potential loss

in recreational dollars caused by long term damage to the trail. All possible steps should be taken to ensure that the loggers cause minimum harm to the LOVIT and that such damage is quickly repaired. All other elements outlined in the scoping letter should be evaluated for their impact on the trail.

Your consideration of this information in your decisions regarding the Gap Creek Project would be appreciated. I look forward to continuing to work as a volunteer in close cooperation with the USFS.

Robert Cavanaugh

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