Senator Rand Paul continues push to sell off parts of Daniel Boone National Forest

In February, Senator Rand Paul introduced a last-minute amendment to the Senate Natural Resources Management Act that would have required Secretary of Agriculture Sonny Purdue to sell off an undisclosed amount of the Daniel Boone National Forest in McCreary and Pulaski Counties with no public input or environmental review. Paul’s amendment failed after a massive backlash.

During the 36 hours leading up to the vote, Kentucky Heartwood’s blog post was viewed by nearly 450,000 people as our call to action went nation-wide, and the Senate Energy and Natural Resources committee line was slammed with calls opposing Paul’s amendment. Undeterred by the backlash, Paul held a hearing in McCreary County in May that continued to scapegoat the Daniel Boone National Forest and Big South Fork National River and Recreation Area for the real and complicated economic struggles of the county.

Senator Paul and McCreary County officials are pushing hard to sell off national forest lands along US-27, KY-90, and Peters Mountain Rd. under the premise that there’s no private land with highway frontage to support development. However, our analysis shows that 63% of the frontage along US-27 in McCreary County is privately owned, including a great deal of undeveloped property and an unfortunate number of closed or abandoned businesses. Private property is similarly available along KY-90, and Peters Mountain Rd., which straddles the DBNF/BSF boundary, has several undeveloped private inholdings.

At the McCreary County forum, several featured speakers talked about the need for more and better-maintained recreational infrastructure on national forest and national park lands. No one bothered to point out that Senator Paul has long and successfully advocated for strangling the U.S. Forest Service and National Park Service of the funds and staff needed to support trails, campgrounds, and recreational management. Paul also made up stories of fake endangered species to bash the Endangered Species Act.

Clearly this story isn’t over. If you get any tips, please let us know. You can watch the hearing on YouTube at www.youtube.com/watch?v=ShQ78NYH9Qw
(Bats, con’t)

Nowhere in the Draft EA does the Forest Service actually say that they intend to increase the amount of the forest getting cut. But it’s clear that increasing logging is the reason behind the proposal. The Draft EA states only that “The Proposed action will not increase vegetation management volume extracted identified in the 2004 Forest Plan.” What’s left out is that meeting the established Forest Plan timber harvest goals – which were widely opposed during the Forest Plan revision process – would mean nearly tripling of the amount of timber cut on the Daniel Boone.

Periodically revising management plans based on updated science and evolving conservation strategies can be a responsible thing to do. Amending the Forest Plan with respect to endangered bats or other at-risk species is not necessarily bad. But even the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has been critical of the proposal, stating in their early comments that “If the action is carried out as proposed, an increase in adverse effects on federally-listed species is anticipated.”

This proposed Plan Amendment is not coming out of concern for protecting endangered bats, or protecting our most imperiled aquatic species. It’s coming from a desire to see more timber cut on more acres, and we think that’s a problem. The Forest Service anticipates issuing a decision this summer. Assuming there are no major changes to the proposal, we are preparing for a major challenge to ensure protections for our endangered, forest-dwelling bats.
After a long, slow season germinating below the surface, the seeds that we planted last year for our new nature connection mentoring program, the Rise & Root Rewilding Project, have sprouted and begun to blossom.

With support from the Kentucky Foundation for Women’s Art Meets Activism grant, we offer single day nature connection adventures and an ongoing Forest School, inviting kids into deep relationship with the wild world and their wild selves.

We believe that kids need wild places, and that wild places need kids who care. We believe that care is born of connection. And so with the Rise & Root Rewilding Project, we’re nurturing connection and helping to empower these young’uns—our future elders!—to be a thriving part of the complex ecological and cultural community of this time and place.

What do we mean by ‘rewilding’? We mean knowing in our guts, in our hearts, and in our brains that we’re part of the living world: and acting accordingly. We mean encouraging kids to use all of their senses, inhabit their bodies, and develop systems thinking. We mean leveraging our privilege toward biodiversity and considering other species with the same respect we grant our own. We mean weaving a culture of curiosity, of consent, and of compassion.

Throughout the month of April, we hosted a series of free, single-day nature connection adventures, inviting young’uns to join us in Coyote Holler, the 200 acres of forests, meadows, thickets, waterfalls, cliffs, and caves in Rockcastle County where we make our home and where Rise & Root is based (also the location of Cumberland Ecoforestry’s pilot site). The response from the kids was inspiring. On those first days it took hours just to wind our way down into the holler proper because there was so much excitement about everything along the way. These single-day events plant the seeds that we’re then able to nurture in our ongoing Forest School.

Our Forest School is the heart of Rise & Root, where we gather with the same groups of kids throughout the year. We currently offer Forest School sessions for kids aged 8 – 12 on alternating Sunday, and for kids aged 4 – 7 on alternating Wednesdays. These are full days (7-8 hours), allowing us to slow down and sink in.

Along with direct toes-in-the-dirt experience, stories are central to how we foster connection. Mentors share stories, of course, but even more important is for kids to tell their own stories and be deeply heard. When we tell a story, we integrate experiences and values into our narratives of self. And so even as we climb the long hill
Forest Service proposes to weaken protections for endangered bats to increase logging on Boone

Kentucky Heartwood submitted detailed comments in April on the Forest Service’s proposal to amend the Daniel Boone National Forest management plan. The proposed amendments would weaken protections for federally-endangered Indiana bats (Myotis sodalis) and federally-threatened northern long-eared bats (Myotis septentrionalis).

The Forest Plan currently includes binding standards that restrict logging in some areas during certain times of the year to reduce risk of harming endangered bats. These restrictions are particularly important in protecting maternity colonies during the especially vulnerable period when young are nonvolant (cannot fly). The restrictions have also contributed to the Forest Service’s inability to log much more than about 1,000 acres per year on the Daniel Boone since the Forest Plan was adopted in 2004. But they want that to change.

The agency, however, is not being honest about why these changes have been proposed. In the Draft Environmental Assessment, the Forest Service states that lifting logging restrictions is needed to shift logging to drier parts of the year, and therefore better limit sedimentation in streams which could impact aquatic species listed under the Endangered Species Act. These species include the Kentucky arrow darter, Cumberland darter, blackside dace, and a wide range of threatened and endangered mussels. That sounds reasonable, until you dig deeper.

In the environmental analysis for each and every timber sale on the Daniel Boone National Forest, the Forest Service states emphatically that the amount of sediment reaching streams from their timber operations is minimal, and will not impact threatened and endangered aquatic species and their habitats. Every. Single. Project. If the Forest Service needs to reduce protections for endangered bats to protect vulnerable aquatic species from logging, does that mean that their logging projects are, in fact, degrading aquatic habitats? If so, will the Forest Service commit to cancelling all active timber sales until the projects can be revised to adequately protect aquatic species? It’s doubtful. But the agency can’t have it both ways.

So what’s this really about?

The need to increase the “pace and scale” of “restoration” (read: logging) has become an ongoing narrative across the U.S. National Forest system. In recent years, we’ve had to respond to a non-stop barrage of legal and regulatory attempts to roll back public participation and environmental protections on our public lands. From the “Resilient Federal Forests Act” to President Trump’s Executive Order on national forests, to the Forest Service’s soon to be released revisions of its NEPA procedures, it’s all about getting more logs out of the forest, and faster. 

(Cont’d on page 11)
(Rise & Root, con’t)

back up out of the holler at the end of a full day of games, exploration, plant-lore, crafting, and ecological lessons, we carry that identity and those connections out with us. We are wild.

On our first day of Forest School, two young people new to Coyote Holler slipped quietly with me between dripping limestone walls to where the spring we drink from comes out of the top of a cave, filtered by the intact forest of the aquifer recharge zone. This wild water is as pristine as the slow journey through the living soil web, mycelial mats, ancient root systems, sand, and stone can make it.

As if to remind us of its precious purity, more than a dozen cave salamanders draped themselves, long-tailed and languid, over wet rock, watching us as carefully as we watched them. Later, back in the meadow, we scanned field guides to confirm the species identity (and absorb images and ideas about other amphibians along the way). We contrasted the cave salamanders with the red-spotted salamanders who live in the small pond that the spring feeds into, following their life cycle from water to woods and back again, exploring the interconnectedness of hydrology, geology, biology. We remembered that the salamanders still thrive here, in Coyote Holler, because there are still old trees on the slopes above the spring and diverse insect communities. (All relative, of course, in this age of ecocide.)

With Rise & Root, we joyfully invite humans to know our place in that web of connection, to be wild and whole. As Rilke said, “If we surrendered to earth’s intelligence, we could rise up rooted, like trees.” We’re so grateful for the opportunity to root deep and rise strong with the families who join us in this work!

To learn more, please visit us online at http://www.kyheartwood.org/rise-and-root-rewilding.html, on Facebook at https://www.facebook.com/riseandrootrewilding/, and on Instagram at https://www.instagram.com/riseandroot_rewilding/.

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Efforts to Save Kentucky’s Hemlocks Continue

The decline of Eastern hemlock in North America is ongoing, but so are Kentucky Heartwood’s efforts to raise awareness of the crisis and save as many trees as we can. So far this season we’ve hosted two volunteer days where we helped treat over 1,000 hemlock trees. Our final hemlock volunteer day of 2019 will be on Wednesday, June 5, where we’ll be treating trees along the Sheltowee Trace from 192 to Vanhook Falls. This very popular section of the Trace passes through an extensive hemlock grove on its way past a series of cascades, pools, and waterfalls. Death of hemlocks in the coming years will result in a large number of treefalls across the trail. By treating a corridor along the trail we can save hemlocks and keep the Sheltowee passable. Many of the hemlocks near the trail bridge on Cane Creek are already dying, so this may be our best chance to save trees in this area. Details for the volunteer event will be on our Facebook page and at www.hopeforhemlocksky.org.

We’ve also participated in the release of two batches of Laricobius nigrinus and one of Laricobius osakensis beetles along the Sheltowee Trace near Hawk Creek. These species of beetles are specialists that eat hemlock woolly adelgid. We were able to obtain about 1,600 beetles from the beneficial insects lab at the University of Tennessee in return for our providing food to the lab for rearing last year.

We’ve also had our second round of print and web advertisements running in newspapers across Eastern Kentucky. The goal of the ad campaign is to make private landowners aware of the crisis and point them toward the resources at our hemlock web portal, www.hopeforhemlocksky.org. There they can find recommendations and step by step instructions for treating infested hemlocks, or protecting healthy trees from infestation. So far we’ve received quite a few phone calls from landowners seeking advice and help. We’ll soon be working on a print brochure for distribution that will contain an abridged version of the information on the website, including best practices for treating trees on private land.

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Kentucky forests need your help!

An invasive insect is killing Kentucky's hemlock trees. Thousands are already gone. Millions more are infested.

Learn how to save the hemlock trees on your land, before it’s too late.

Visit www.hopeforhemlocksky.org
Or call 859-334-0602
for information and assistance.

*Average treatment cost is $1 per tree*
Forest Service says old-growth forest is only 65 years-old, should be logged

By Jim Scheff, Director

Last year the Forest Service released a proposal to log over 3,000 acres of the Redbird District, part of the South Redbird Wildlife Enhancement Project. Most of the proposed logging would be even-aged “shelterwood” harvests that cut most of the trees on areas up to 350 acres on steep slopes above streams designated as Critical Habitat for the federally-threatened Kentucky arrow darter. Only 8,000 acres on the Daniel Boone NF proposed for new logging projects. Surveying all of these areas is very time consuming, and more detailed assessments even more so. Through the support of our members, we’ve been able to look at about 3,000 acres so far, but there’s much more to be done.

The Forest Service’s quarterly Schedule of Proposed Actions (SOPA) states that the Forest Service is considering 80,000 acres on the David Boone NF for proposed harvesting. Surveying all of these areas is very time consuming, and more detailed assessments even more so. Through the support of our members, we’ve been able to look at about 3,000 acres so far, but there’s much more to be done.

Using an increment borer to extract small core samples from 16 trees (including 8 ash, white oak, and mockernut hickory. The lines on the left are each 1 mm. The lines on the left are each 1 mm.

Tree ring samples from Little Flat Creek old-growth white ash, white oak, and mockernut hickory. The lines on the left are each 1 mm.

Last fall, we examined the stand and found that it exhibits old-growth characteristics as described in the R8 Guidance, and appears to meet all of the required characteristics for designation as old-growth. We wrote to the District Ranger describing our observations, informing him that the stand needed closer examination, and that it should be conserved for its old-growth character and not logged.

The response that we received from the Forest Service refuted our observations, as the stand is considered as existing old growth. The R8 Guidance states that “For a stand to be considered as old growth, no obvious evidence of past human disturbance which the area should be present.” It’s important to note that the human disturbance during our assessment, we found consistent pattern of logging and thinning, and other evidence of past human disturbance including clear-cutting and selective logging. The stand is over 100 years old. The Forest Service thinks that’s too much, and plans to cut it down instead of preserving it as old growth.

Based on our surveys, the Little Flat Creek stand clearly meets the operational threshold for old growth. The stand exhibits classic old-growth characteristics for Appalachian forests, including a multi-aged structure dominated by very old trees, large down woody debris and snags, and a history of moderate to low severity disturbance events. It is upsetting that the Forest Service, in all their expertise, classified this old-growth forest as a 65 year-old stand, and so readily dismissed information contradicting their assessment. It brings into question their assessments across the forest, and makes us wonder how much of our other forests are on the chopping block. Right now there are about 6,000 acres on the Daniel Boone NF proposed for new logging projects. Surveying all of these areas is very time consuming, and more detailed assessments even more so. Through the support of our members, we’ve been able to look at about 3,000 acres so far, but there’s much more to be done.

The Forest Service’s quarterly Schedule of Proposed Actions (SOPA) states that the South Redbird project is expected now (May 2019), but all indications are that they are considerably behind schedule.