



# KENTUCKY HEARTWOOD

Protecting the Beauty and Wellbeing of Kentucky's Native Forests

Tina Tilley, Area Supervisor  
Land Between the Lakes National Recreation Area  
100 Van Morgan Drive  
Golden Pond, Kentucky 42211

RE: Birmingham Ferry Salvage Project

September 14, 2016

Dear Supervisor Tilley,

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Birmingham Ferry Salvage project. While we recognize the duty of the Forest Service to address genuine, potential hazards, we have several concerns about this project that we believe need to be addressed before any action is approved. We also would like to reiterate our concerns over the Forest Service timing this comment period to overlap with the Fox Hollow scoping comment period. There was no reason to not delay one or the other project by a few weeks to ensure the public ample opportunity to consider and comment on both projects.

Below you will find a discussion of our main concerns, followed by an alternative approach that we think would mitigate negative impacts and be more acceptable to much of the public.

## **1. Lack of Information**

The Forest Service has failed to provide adequate information in the scoping document to allow for meaningful public comment with regard to significant issues. The proposal includes 120 acres of harvest across a 230-acre salvage area. However, the scoping document map, which provide the only location information available to the public, shows 6 salvage units totaling 302 acres. By phone conversation, John Westbrook explained this 72-acre discrepancy by citing stream buffers and other exclusions. If this is the case, then it should be explained in the scoping document. Further, and as described in detail below, the proposal would approve 46 acres of harvests in Core Areas, though this is not disclosed in the scoping document.

The scoping document also fails to disclose how much of the project area would be occupied by log landings. With 6 harvest units, we would anticipate at least 6 log landings. How many acres would they occupy and where? This is not incidental. Log landings are essentially small clearcuts with exposed and compacted mineral soil. Similarly, the scoping document does not indicate how many temporary roads will need to be constructed and where. The Categorical Exclusion invoked allows for up to ½ mile of temporary road, but this tells us nothing of where so that the public can consider any site specific impacts. For example, should we expect the construction of temporary roads and log landings in Core Areas?

## **2. Core Areas**

The scoping letter fails to disclose that the Forest Service has included two Core Areas in the salvage units proposed for harvest. Twenty-eight acres of the Core Area in Pisgah Bay are included, in addition to another 18 acres of a Core Area near Cravens Bay. We were only able to learn that the proposal included logging in Core

Areas by combining project-level GIS files with forest-wide prescription area files (see attached maps). Failing to disclose that you are proposing logging in areas that are generally considered off-limits to logging, much less through a Categorical Exclusion with no future opportunities for disclosure, analysis, or comment, is deeply concerning. We contend that proposing harvests in Core Areas for the type of impacts incurred violates the Area Plan, and further that using a Categorical Exclusion to harvest Core Areas is inappropriate under 36 CFR 220.6.

The Area Plan (Plan at 30) describes 1.B Core Areas as follows (emphases added):

Emphasis

The Core Areas comprise approximately 42,000 acres designed to facilitate greater understanding of forest environments through collaborative research, administrative studies, and other working relationships. **These areas serve as controls in comparative management and, in most cases, have little to no management disturbance.** Core Areas provide remote, semi-primitive recreational opportunities that have minimal impacts to ecological systems. **They serve as large, medium, and small patches of future old growth** and they include two State Natural Areas (SNA) including a native shortleaf pine restoration area. The two SNAs, Devils Backbone and Bear Creek, are managed in cooperation with the Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation.

These areas provide good to optimal habitat for mid- to late-seral eastern deciduous hardwood forest associates. **Management activities are limited to include only those needed to deal with forest health emergencies, wildfire, restoration and maintenance of native communities, and recovery of threatened and endangered (T&E) species. Vegetation management may be necessary to prevent a widespread outbreak of insects or disease.** In particular, active management, including prescribed fire and timber harvest, will be needed to restore and maintain native shortleaf pine forests in the Devil's Backbone State Natural Area.

Desired Condition:

Core areas appear as having a naturally-evolving structural condition on the landscape due to low-intensity management within forested areas. **Forests are primarily older with areas of continuous canopy and occasional gaps as a result of storms, insect or disease outbreak, fire, and reverting fields.** A mix of species, including more shade-tolerant species than general forest, occurs in forest cover types across all site types. **Forest cover types vary in canopy and understory structure and include many canopy gaps, snags, downed wood, and den trees.**

There are two important take-aways here. First, the Core Areas management prescription is intended for the development of future old-growth, including “occasional gaps as a result of storms, insect or disease outbreak, fire, and reverting fields,” with “many canopy gaps, snags, downed wood, and den trees.” These structural components associated with old-growth forest conditions are created through natural disturbance events like the event that this project is responding to. Salvaging timber in Core Areas will impede the development of “snags, downed wood, and den trees” and therefore go against the expressed intent and direction for Core Areas in the Area Plan.

We are incorporating here, and including by attachment, the 2012 master's thesis by Jim Scheff, *The Development of Old-Growth Structural Characteristics in Second-Growth Forests of the Cumberland Plateau, Kentucky, U.S.A.* This thesis includes an extensive discussion and literature review addressing the structural components associated with old-growth forests in our region, with particular emphasis on the development of old-growth characteristics in secondary forests. The discussion and findings are consistent with the language in the Core Areas description in the Area Plan.

It is clear that that direction for Core Areas in the Area Plan includes downfall and damaged trees from storm damage. But we recognize that the Core Area prescription also allows for some vegetation management for specific reasons. As quoted above, the prescription area Emphasis (Area Plan at 30) states:

Management activities are limited to include only those needed to deal with forest health emergencies, wildfire, restoration and maintenance of native communities, and recovery of threatened and endangered (T&E) species. Vegetation management may be necessary to prevent a widespread outbreak of insects or disease.

Under the Area Plan Standards for Forest and Open Lands Management (Area Plan at 77), the Plan states:

31. Forest management treatments, within Core Area Prescriptions, will be limited to the minimum necessary level for maintenance and restoration of native ecological communities or to provide visitor safety. Treatments may be considered to control or prevent insect infestation and disease, and invasive, non-native plant species.

The scoping letter states:

“These treatments will also reduce the risk of insect and disease damage to the surrounding area.”

What specific risks from insect and disease are posed to the surrounding areas by from this natural event? Insects and fungi in down, dead wood are unlikely to attack healthy, undamaged trees elsewhere (and are, in fact, important contributors to the food web). Damaged trees may be more susceptible to disease or insects, but this is normal and natural and helps with snag and cavity tree formation, and are not likely affect healthy trees and stands in surrounding areas in any significant way. Vague statements that trees falling from a natural event will cause “insect and disease damage” to surrounding areas to justify timber sales operating against the clear direction in the Area Plan for Core Areas violates the Plan.

### **3. Inappropriate Use of a Categorical Exclusion**

Proposing to log Core Areas violates 36 CFR 220.6. While Core Area designation is not listed as one of the *Resource conditions* for considering extraordinary circumstances under 36 CFR 220.6(b)(1), Section (iii) does include national recreation area status as a resource condition to consider. A meaningful part of the administrative identity of Land Between the Lakes National Recreation Area is its status as the Land Between the Lakes Biosphere Reserve under the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). Land Between the Lakes was designated as the 300<sup>th</sup> Biosphere Reserve in 1991 after petitioning by the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA). Core Areas, beyond being an Area Plan prescription, are a required part of the Biosphere Reserve zonation system. Commercial harvest in Core Areas, including the construction of temporary roads and log landings, could have impacts on these Core Areas that degrade their status and purpose within the national recreation area as UNESCO Biosphere Reserve, and as such is properly considered an “extraordinary circumstance” under 36 CFR 220.6.

### **4. Invasive Species**

It is well recognized that logging operations easily introduce invasive species into forest interiors. Beyond opening the canopy, soil disturbance from road construction (including temporary roads), skidder trails, and log landings create ideal conditions for many invasive species to become established. Logging equipment can easily act

as a vector, bringing in seed and other propagules to the newly disturbed ground. This is a negative impact that the Forest Service needs to consider. How will this be addressed? Will there be pre- and post-harvest surveys and treatments?

## **5. Rare and Sensitive Plants**


We want to be sure that the Forest Service has reviewed existing data from the Kentucky State Nature Preserves Commission and surveyed salvage areas to ensure that no roadside or other populations of PETS, state-listed, or other rare species are impacted through salvage operations. Has this been done?

## **6. User Safety and Reasonable Alternatives**

Should any harvest be approved, we recommend that the Forest Service limit harvests to within 200 feet of existing roads, campsites, or other infrastructure. Few members of the public venture any further into the forest, and those that do are generally accustomed to navigating inconveniences and hazards. The 200-foot zone would allow the Forest Service ample opportunity to address potential hazard areas while avoiding most or all temporary road and log landing construction and associated impacts.

If you would like to discuss these comments further, please do not hesitate to contact us.

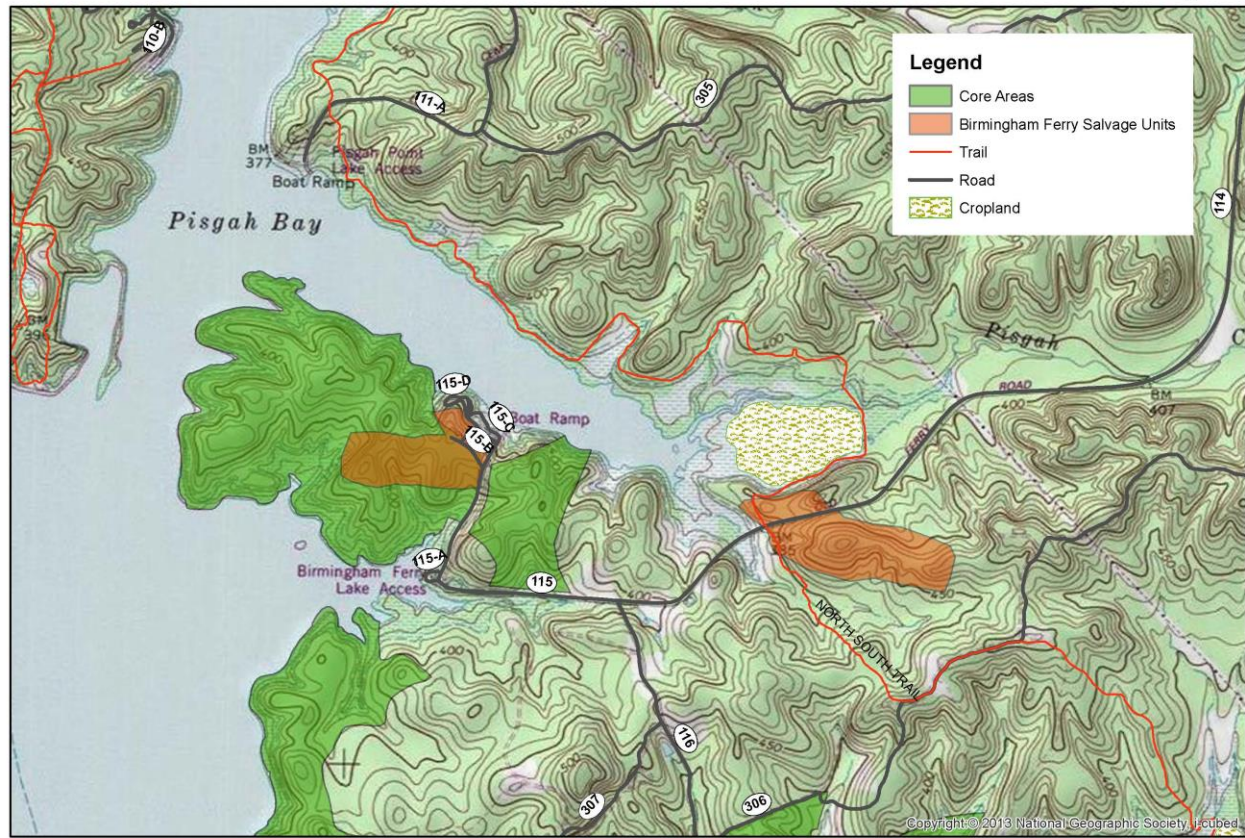
Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jim Scheff". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

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# Birmingham Ferry Salvage West





# Birmingham Ferry Salvage East

