Logging in Redbird District leads to Landslides and Wrecked Mountainsides

Kentucky Heartwood has documented multiple, on-going landslides in the Redbird District of the Daniel Boone National forest caused by logging in the Group One project in Clay and Leslie Counties. To date, we’ve identified at least 6 landslides in the Ulisses Creek and Lower Jack’s Branch watersheds. At least three landslides dumped sediment into streams, and two of them took out roughly 300 feet of mountainside. All of the landslides started at “full bench” skid trails that the Forest Service allowed to be bulldozed across the mountainsides for loggers to access the timber. We also found that the Forest Service had allowed more of the forest to be bulldozed and scraped clear than is permitted under the Forest Plan.

Prior to our bringing these landslides to their attention, the Forest Service claimed that no landslides or other major erosion had resulted from their logging operations. Their position was (and remains) that Forest Plan Standards for the Daniel Boone National Forest, as well as Kentucky’s state forestry Best Management Practices (BMPs), are effectively protecting forest soils and streams.

Unfortunately they’re not. And to the extent that landslides and erosion are demonstrably occurring, the Forest Service has so far excused the damage by saying that it’s not that bad and only happens when it rains a lot. (Cont’d on page 11)
Friends,

Fifteen years ago Kentucky Heartwood started the Kentucky Heartwood Music Festival to celebrate our beautiful forests and the bold frontline work our organization does to protect them. We also needed to raise money - small activist groups like ours that regularly challenge the federal government rarely have access to funds that more conventional non profits enjoy. And so began an event that has offered up the best of what we have. We've enjoyed good food and homegrown produce, great music from Kentucky musicians, original plays created and produced by kids, the cool water of Glenns Creek, inspiring speakers, and workshops about everything from herbal medicine to using solar cookers.

Over time the music festival has become a community tradition more than an event put on by Kentucky Heartwood. One of my particular joys in organizing the festival has been to watch my children grow up with it. My daughter Natalie was a year old when we held the first festival. Two and a half years later I had to find a quiet place to nurse my 6 month old Sophie in the midst of running the event. I've seen the wild fun that they've had playing in the creek, jumping in the bouncy house, and running in the grass and through the gym with its giant fan. Like so many other kids, they moved from exploring the cardboard play house and watching the musicians under the tree to actually making music themselves and participating in the kids' competition. They held the banner and led the kids' parade waving their leaves and holding their animal posters high. They performed in the kids' play. Last year Natalie and her high school friends ran the obstacle course for kids.

Throughout the years, I've seen lots of kids grow up with the festival. I delight in using the event to provide opportunities for kids (and others!) to learn, challenge themselves, take risks, and bask in the glow of a loving community. Take Maya Burke, for example. As a freshman in high school, Maya was too shy to get up on stage and compete despite her musical talent. By the time she was eighteen she was on stage all day as emcee of the whole event!

We will have to wait until next year to celebrate the 15th edition of the Kentucky Heartwood Music Festival. COVID-19 has fundamentally changed our world, and this message is sent with the hope that everyone is healthy and finding their balance amidst the tumult. My hope for society is that we emerge from this pandemic with a new respect for each other and the natural world.

For 28 years Kentucky Heartwood's work to protect intact forests has been a force in Kentucky. Our mission is a solution to climate instability and problems (like pandemics) triggered by the collapse of natural systems. We can't celebrate with you in person this year, but we need your help to continue our essential work. Please consider donating to Kentucky Heartwood this month to support our ongoing work toward the bright future within our reach.

For the forests,
Chris Schimmoeller, Kentucky Heartwood Council member

Music Fest 2020 Update

In addition to erosion and slides, infestations of non-native invasive plants (NNIPs) are especially bad in the Group One project. We conducted surveys of a logging unit harvested in 2012 and documented 18 species of NNIPs. We sampled twenty-four 125 ft² plots set perpendicular to skid trails, and found an average cover of NNIPs of 39.8%. Thirty-eight percent of plots had more than 50% coverage of NNIPs. The Forest Service asserted in the Environmental Assessment for the Group One project that the spread of NNIPs as a result of logging was possible, but was unlikely to be significant. The Forest Service has stated that all contract provisions for minimizing NNIP infestations were followed in the harvest.

The Group One project was approved in 2008 after being withdrawn twice following administrative challenges by Kentucky Heartwood. Over 1,000 acres of logging were ultimately approved for various "forest health" and "habitat improvement" purposes. The Forest Service issued a draft approval in February of 2020 for 3,000 more acres of logging in the nearby South Redbird project. The Draft Decision Notice was temporarily withdrawn due to the COVID pandemic, though it may likely be reissued soon. The South Redbird project will allow the same types of logging on the same types of slopes and soils as Group One, but at a much larger scale - with some logging tracts over 300 acres in size (10 times bigger than logging units in the Group One project). Up to 91 miles of full-bench skid roads could be bulldozed across the mountainsides. Most of the South Redbird logging will occur in watersheds that provide critical habitat for the federally-threatened Kentucky arrow darter (Etheostoma spilotum), and habitat for the federally-endangered Snuffbox mussel (Epioblasma triquetra).

(Redbird landslides, cont')

(KENTUCKY HEARTWOOD MEMBERSHIP FORM

Mail to: P.O. Box 1486, Berea KY, 40403
Contact us at: kentuckyheartwood@gmail.com
www.kyheartwood.org ☑ 859-334-0602

Please add my name to the list of people who want to see Kentucky's public lands protected.

MEMBER NAME(S) ________________________________________________
ADDRESS ______________________________________________________
CITY/ST/ZIP ___________________________________________________
PHONE __________________ EMAIL _______________________________
______ $5 Hunter/Gatherer _______ $50 Family Membership
______ $30 Basic Membership _______ $ Whatever you want to give
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______ I can volunteer my time ______ No postal mail

This donation is a gift from:_________________________________
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Thank You!

I've struggled over these past few weeks with whether or not to publish a statement on behalf of Kentucky Heartwood in response to the historic Black Lives Matter protests and demonstrations happening across the country. And I continue to struggle with that even now. We've all been on a learning journey to understand our history, my history, and the context in which we find ourselves today.

Many of us have been pleasantly surprised with the breadth of the movement and the articulation of the issues, and the call to action. I'm grateful for the change it has brought, and for the opportunity to stand with you. But I'm also aware that much of the conversation has been about the narratives from the outside in, and has not fully container.

Black Lives Matter is a call to action. It is not a question of whether racism is real or not. It is real, and has real consequences. The question is how we move forward.

To be clear, Kentucky Heartwood, including our Board and Staff, oppose racism in any and all forms. We have a sense of the structural racism and police violence. These issues are real, and they are unacceptable.

However, I do want to offer some personal thoughts and observations regarding structural racism and the conspicuous underrepresentation of people of color in conservation and outdoor recreation spaces. I have been involved in public lands protection for 20 years, and I have been enjoying the experiences of many people of color, but I have also been involved with most public lands advocates who have not noticed this. They are not aware of these conversations about issues of color in our organizations, as well as the conservation movement more broadly. Despite these efforts, including my own - have rarely moved beyond conversations and the setting of intentions.

For years, I excused this absence of people from our organizations, campaigns, and spaces as a result of the fact that most people of color are not interested in conservation and the outdoors. It is true that many Black people are not interested in conservation and the outdoors, but it is also true that centuries of white supremacist violence and structural inequities continue to affect so many Black people's relationships with, and access to, America's wild outdoor spaces and public lands. This is at best shallow. What I do know is that there are stories that need to be heard, both of history and lived experience.

I think sometimes about the race riot in Corbin in 1919, just 18 years before the establishment of the Cumberland National Forest (later to be renamed the Daniel Boone National Forest). A vibrant Black community of roughly 200 people was summarily expelled from their homes and businesses, and their property was burned.

But this perspective accepts too much exclusion, both within our organizations and in the outdoor spaces that we work to protect. It ignores the gross unfairness of the fact that centuries of white supremacist violence and structural inequities continue to affect so many Black people's relationships with, and access to, America's wild outdoor spaces and public lands. This is at best shallow. What I do know is that there are stories that need to be heard, both of history and lived experience.

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rounded up, forced on to rail cars, and removed from the state to the words “By God we are going to run all Negroes out of this town tonight.” For those families who’s stories and memories include this violent episode, what does it mean to pass Corbin on the way to Cumberland Falls? Does it mean something different today than it did a generation ago? What about the ways that “sundown laws” kept Black families from traveling to visit State and National Parks, National Forests, and other public lands? What is the legacy of the Commonwealth of Kentucky barring Black people, by order of law, from nearly all State Parks until 1955 when the Supreme Court ruled the practice unconstitutional? What does it mean when going to a park or stopping for gas on your way home could mean arrest, or worse? How are the outdoor experiences of a young person of color, today, affected by the stories of their parents or grandparents?

And it would be so easy, perhaps even comfortable, to pretend that the exclusion of Black people from outdoor spaces is some relic of the past. But it’s not. In February of this year, 25 year-old Ahmaud Arbery was shot dead while going for a run by armed vigilantes who assumed that he’d committed a crime. He hadn’t. In May, Audubon Society Board Member and notable comic book author Chris Cooper had his life threatened while birding in New York’s Central Park when a white woman got upset because he asked her to follow the rules and leash her dog. Her response was to call the police, frantic, and telling the lie that a Black man was threatening her. He wasn’t. Or we could talk about North Carolina botanist (and musician and chef), Justin Robinson who was handcuffed while looking at plants in the woods. I know a lot of botanists. All are white. And I’m fairly certain that none have been put in handcuffs while looking at plants.

Or we can talk about the Confederate flags displayed prominently on homes and farms along the road sections of the 333-mile Sheltowee Trace National Recreation Trail. How can a person of color experience the trail as I can, and find the same peace and ease in walking those long miles with so many Kentuckians proudly flying a flag that says “I’d rather you be in chains”?

And even within Kentucky’s outdoor community, racism continues to bubble to the surface. Over the past month, one of the only prominent Black people in Kentucky’s conservation and outdoor recreation community, someone I consider a friend, has been repeatedly attacked through social media with vitriol and accusations of racism for speaking with measured words about… racism. Their repeated message is “Shut up.” Over and again, “Shut up. Your story is not welcome here.”

I don’t know the answers. And I won’t pretend to. But I’m pretty certain that, at least for white people like me, now a time to listen. And it is okay if the voices and stories being lifted challenge your understanding of the world, or even your understanding of yourself. But what is not okay is to respond to this moment, to the cries of grief and anger over generations of state-sanctioned violence and exclusion, to the murders of Breonna Taylor, George Floyd, Stephon Clark, Philando Castille, Tamir Rice, and so many others, by dismissing the very real and contemporary effects of structural racism in America. Such denials are lacking in veracity and belie the facts. They are simply not serious.

Our public lands belong to all of us. The experiences they give us should be accessible to all of us. And it will take all of us to protect them in this age of accelerating climate change and biodiversity collapse. The status quo is not acceptable. Black Lives Matter.

Jim Scheff
Director, Kentucky Heartwood

woodland restoration activities described above, the habitat benefits of shelterwood harvests tend to be brief, while the impacts of road building, non-native plant invasions, and loss of large trees persist. Hopefully the Forest Service will provide more care and attention to management in these areas than we’ve seen in recent harvests in the Redbird District.

Indiana and northern long-eared bats: One of the big sticking points for Kentucky Heartwood has been the Forest Service’s refusal to conduct surveys for endangered bats in proposed harvest areas. In particular, we are concerned about impacts to maternity colonies of federally-endangered Indiana bats and federally-threatened northern long-eared bats. The Forest Plan has a requirement that “Tree cutting may not be conducted within 2.5 miles of any Indiana bat maternity colony from May 1 through August 15.” This binding Forest Plan Standard also applies to Northern long-eared bats.

However, the Forest Service is relying on limited survey data from more than a decade ago to determine that no maternity colonies are in the project area. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, in comments they submitted last year on a proposed Forest Plan amendment which would limit protections for endangered bats, cited this paucity of survey data in stating that “It appears likely that there are other Indiana bat and northern long-eared bat maternity colonies present that have not been documented.”

We raised this issue in our comments and through the formal, predecisional objection process. The Forest Service refused to budge on this.

The Pine Creek project area covers some of the best parts of the Daniel Boone National Forest. It’s a rugged landscape where the Rockcastle River and its tributaries cut deep gorges through the sandstone of the Pottsville Escarpment of the Cumberland Plateau. It’s a labyrinthine, magical world of cliffs and waterfalls, natural arches and old-growth forests. It’s home to a myriad of rare and endemic species, like Lucy Braun’s white snakeroot and Indiana bats. And it includes some of the most utilized and loved recreational sites in the Daniel Boone.

We thank every one of you that sent comments to the Forest Service advocating for this special landscape.

Your contributions had a tangible effect on the outcome of this project. Thank you.
The Forest Service has also incorporated a novel approach to restoring shortleaf and pitch pine in these areas. These species were decimated during the 1999-2002 southern pine beetle outbreak. Contrasting with previous pine restoration efforts, the Forest Service here plans to plant pine in small, isolated forest patches and use prescribed fire to encourage new growth. This approach helps protect the migrating trees and their natural environment.

The restoration of fire-adapted upland communities, with an intermix of semi-stable grassland, shrubland, and open-canopy forests, is a way to provide for the long-term habitat needs of species that rely on early-seral and related vegetation structures.

Close and rehabilitate user-made OHV and horse trails: The Forest Service used LIDAR to document 23 miles of illegal OHV and horse trails impacting the state Wild River section of the Rockcastle River. The Forest Service plans to close and rehabilitate these user trails by felling trees, placing boulders, and revegetating areas near the river.

The not-good stuff:

1,150 acres of shelterwood cuts: The Pine Creek project still includes 1,150 acres of shelterwood regeneration cuts. With the help of our members and the Forest Service, we have been able to reduce the number of acres cut by 500.

We’ve also assisted the Kentucky Division of Forestry and Daniel Boone National Forest by doing field assessments of undergrowth and conducting surveys to help prioritize areas for retirement. We have also worked with the Forest Service to provide information about saving hemlocks in several editions of the London Sentinel. We’ve had a number of people reach out to us for more information and even to share pictures with us of the hemlocks they’ve helped save.

We’ve also continued to collect live adelgid for the University of Tennessee’s insect control program. The Forest Service has been releasing the beetles on the forest floor. The beetles are used to help control the hemlock woolly adelgid, which has been infesting the forest.

We’ve also worked to get information to private landowners, so that people can save hemlocks on their own property. We’ve put a lot of information about saving hemlocks on our website, www.savehemlocks.org. We’ve also worked on educational programs to help spread the word about saving hemlocks.

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A big “Thank You!” to all of the volunteers who have come out to help us save the hemlocks. Special thanks also go out to Ben Resp, who has been working with Kentucky Heartwood this season. He has helped us with our trails and has also been working on the hemlock project.

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In January the Forest Service published their final decision on the Pine Creek Forest Restoration Project. The final approval of the project comes 4 years after the Forest Service's first meetings to gather input on this extensive project covering what is, arguably, one of the best parts of the Daniel Boone National Forest. Over these four years, Kentucky Heartwood submitted multiple rounds of formal comments and led an administrative objection (with Kentucky Resources Council) challenging portions of the Draft Decision and Finding of No Significant Impact. We covered thousands of acres in the field, documented old-growth and rare plants, exploded user impacts at Pine Island Double Falls, and walked the length of the Sheltowee Trace National Recreation Trail as it traverses the project area. We led field trips, hosted a public forum in Corbin, published numerous articles and blog posts, and shared stories and images of this outstanding piece of Kentucky. We worked hard to spread word about this project, and helped the public become involved.

We think that our efforts had a big impact on the final outcome. There are certainly aspects of the Pine Creek project that we are not happy with. However, there's a lot that we are happy with.

This is a complicated project, in many ways reflecting the complexity of the landscape, the biodiversity, and the myriad of ways that the public connects with it. First, let's talk about the good stuff:

**New old-growth designations:** For the first time since adoption of the Forest Plan in 2004, the Forest Service expanded official old-growth designations in the Daniel Boone National Forest. We worked with the Forest Service to identify areas that would be most significant for biodiversity and the unique communities that exist in the Pine Creek project area. We submitted detailed comments, which helped shape the final decision.

**Dropping 2,000 acres of shelterwood harvests:** The Pine Creek project originally included over 3,200 acres of even-aged shelterwood harvests. Approximately 1,300 acres were proposed to be harvested over the next 5 to 10 years. We worked with the Forest Service to adjust the harvest plans, and the final approval dropped 2,000 acres of shelterwood harvesting from the project.

**Restoration of fire-adapted upland forest and grassland communities:** One of the most fascinating aspects of the ecology of the southern Daniel Boone National Forest is the presence of fire-adapted grassland and oak communities. We worked with the Forest Service to develop a management prescription that would include prescribed fire, commercial and non-commercial thinning, and other work to restore these communities.

**Protecting the Sheltowee Trace National Recreation Trail:** The Sheltowee Trace National Recreation Trail goes through much of the project area. We worked with the Forest Service to develop a management prescription that would protect the trail and maintain its scenic integrity. During the formal objection process we convinced the Forest Service to change the prescription. This new prescription includes areas that were previously proposed for timber harvest, and it removes some of the midstory that would have negatively impacted the experience of trail users.

The Forest Service has also committed to a public process to develop a trail along the road. This new prescription will retain much more of the forest canopy and midstory, and will include some timber harvest, should result in an open forest structure with good amount of remaining canopy and large trees.

**Pine Island Double Falls:** Over the course of the project's development, visitation of Pine Island Double Falls exploded. We convinced the Forest Service to drop the shelterwood logging prescription for a 30-acre stand that would have been significantly impacted. We worked to develop a new prescription that would protect the falls and try to limit the expanding and unmanaged user impacts, while still including some timber harvest, should result in an open forest structure with good amount of remaining canopy and large trees.

We hope that the Forest Service will continue to work with communities and stakeholders to ensure that this project continues to meet the needs of all those who value this area. The Pine Creek project is an important step in protecting and restoring this unique part of the Daniel Boone National Forest.