



NATIONAL DEER ASSOCIATION

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Fred Mascher
Acting District Ranger
Croatan Ranger District
141 East Fisher Avenue
New Bern, NC 28560

29 June, 2023

RE: Comments Regarding the White House Forks Restoration Project Draft Environmental Assessment

Dear Mr. Mascher:

On behalf of the National Deer Association (NDA), I am writing to state our support for Alternate 2, Modified Proposed Action for the proposed project focused on silvicultural and wildlife vegetative treatments in the White House Forks Restoration project area to improve forest health, wildlife habitat, and restore natural forest desired conditions on nearly 4,500 acres of National Forest System (NFS) lands. We are a national non-profit conservation organization with the mission to ensure the future of wild deer, wildlife habitat and hunting. We represent tens-of-thousands of members nationwide, and our membership includes hunters, landowners and natural resource professionals.

The White House Forks Restoration project is designed to improve forest health by decreasing susceptibility and increasing resilience and resistance to insects and disease by utilizing vegetative management techniques that mimic natural disturbances that open the overstory and midstory. These techniques will encourage growth of species best adapted to local growing conditions in the area. The NDA supports the use of these techniques. Specifically, we support the use of these techniques by the Croatan Ranger District to improve forest health by decreasing susceptibility and increasing resilience and resistance to insects and disease. The proposed project will improve quality habitat for rare and declining species, as well as desired game and non-game species, reduce susceptibility across the landscape to wildfires and disease, and provide sustainable recreation and access opportunities through infrastructure maintenance and reconstruction.

The NDA is dedicated to ensuring the future of wild deer, wildlife habitat and hunting. The White House Forks Restoration Project advances the future of all three by enhancing and providing quality habitat for game and non-game species, increasing forest resiliency and creating and improving access. Through our extensive work on deer and habitat management across North America, we know that the actions proposed by the Forest Service will benefit wild deer by enhancing the varying habitat requirements, critical habitat components and ecosystem preferences of the region's fauna. The region's white-tailed deer require varying habitat types and structures, and the proposal's inclusion of wildlife habitat enhancement measures such as timber management provide deer and other species with much-needed cover and forage. Additionally, managing for plant diversity – both age and species – is important. Although we recognize this can be achieved many ways, we believe doing so through targeted wildlife opening management as originally proposed can be beneficial.

We applaud the Croatan Ranger District's diligent and thoughtful work in drafting a proposal that greatly improves wildlife habitat in the Croatan National Forest. Further, we support the Forest Service's inclusion of hunters and other stakeholders in the forest management process.

Sincerely,

Torin Miller
Senior Director of Policy