

FROM THE FRONT



Photo from McCreary Journal Archives

Nov. 23, 2022: A large crowd gathered at a town hall style public meeting concerning the U.S. Forest Service's proposed Jellico Vegetation Management Project. More than a dozen McCreary Countians attended the meeting in Whitley County to learn about the project and express concerns.

JELlico

from A1

lic notification of these preliminary documents mark the start of the 45-day objection period.

In other words, the Draft Notice is the Forest Service's way of saying, "We are anticipating doing this, and based on our environmental assessment, here is why. All of you who previously submitted specific written comments on the Jellico proposed project during scoping or other designated opportunities for public comment have had your say, and now you have a final chance to formally object to this specific proposal before we sign off on it."

The Jellico Vegetation Management Supplemental Project could affect approximately 9,537 acres (14.9 square miles) within the Jellico Mountains of Daniel Boone National Forest land in McCreary

and Whitley Counties, south of Hwy 92 and between I-75 and U.S. Hwy 27. Impacted areas and communities in McCreary County include Osborne Creek, Hayes Creek, Rock Creek Mountain, and Marsh Creek, among others. If finalized as initially proposed, the project would include silvicultural treatments and roadwork to be implemented over the next 40 years. Silvicultural treatments with timber harvest and salvage include clear-cutting, two-age shelterwood, deferment harvest, and commercial thinning. Herbicide use is also proposed.

The U.S. Forest Service justifies the project by noting that the Jellico Mountains are trending toward mature forests and that biodiversity in young and mid-aged forests is being lost. According to Forest Service experts, implementing the proposal

will increase "project area biodiversity by providing a mix of habitats for flora and fauna."

However, the Jellico project has faced vigorous opposition from affected communities and environmental groups such as Kentucky Heartwood. Hundreds of individuals responded during the prior 30-day public comment period, with most either opposing the proposal or favoring a scaled-down alternative plan.

Most local opponents express concern about the project's size and scope, extensive clear-cutting, herbicide use, water quality, endangered species, the introduction of invasive species through the proposed roadwork, loss of biodiversity, and the potential for erosion, landslides, and flooding in the populated valleys below the mountains. Many opponents have proposed their own alternative to the

Forest Service's project: the creation of a Jellico Mountain Recreation Area (JRMA) in the DBNF along I-75, which would attract tourists and spur long-term economic development in McCreary and Whitley Counties.

Those wishing to object during the official objection period can find the specific instructions for submitting objections on page A11 of this week's McCreary Journal. Objections will be accepted only from those who have previously submitted specific written comments on the proposed project during scoping or other designated public comment opportunities. The objection period ends 45 days after the date of publication of this week's legal notice in the McCreary Journal (January 21, 2026).

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from A1

responded to 4,479 calls in 2025. He provided data on the types of medical runs, including the following: 370 abdominal-related, 142 mental health, 76 diabetic, 869 general, 10 heat-related, 221 respiratory, 27 allergic reactions, 419 cardiovascular, 174 psychiatric emergencies, 426 trauma, 24 ob-gyn, 67 strokes, 89 seizures, 71 drug overdoses, 56 cardiac arrest/CPR, and 286 vehicle accidents. EMS responded to 196 runs to USP McCreary, and 112 runs were flown out by helicopter. According to Barnett, McCreary EMS averaged the following response times: 1 minute/53 seconds for out-the-door response time to calls, 10 minutes/47 seconds for on-scene response time, 47 minutes average transport time to hospital, and a total transport (including back-in-county) aver-

age response time of 2 hours and 15 minutes. In 2025, McCreary County EMS generated \$2.6 million in revenue, enabling EMS to cover its own costs for the second year in a row. Barnett, who also heads 911, noted that McCreary County 911 Dispatch answered 12,129 calls in 2025.

Tax administrator Stephanie Tucker reported the following occupation tax revenue for the 2025 Fiscal Year: Net collections: \$2,467,028.12 with \$822,260.47 going to the Jail Fund and \$1,644,767.65 to the General Fund.

Alcohol Beverage Control Director Brenda Blevins reported that, to date in 2025 (her collection runs a month behind), McCreary County has collected \$101,538.33 in regulatory fees and \$16,400 in license fees for a total of \$117,938.33. Merchants sold \$2,248,615.55 in 2025. Currently,

McCreary County has 26 businesses licensed to sell alcohol, with a few still pending.

Park Director Melissa Vanover reported that County Parks generated \$34,610 in revenue from park rentals in 2025. The McCreary County Park Building netted \$13,785, and Sand Hill RV Park took in \$20,825 (\$15,325 from campsites).

Tourism Director Michelle Perry reported a year of growth for McCreary Tourism, reflected in both transient taxes and new events. Tourism also received statewide recognition from KTI (Bronze and Silver Awards).

Road Supervisor Tony Kidd said his crew fulfilled 861 work orders originating from the Court and citizen concerns. Work orders do not include routine grading and mowing work.

Stephen McKinney, Emergency Management Director, said his department's duties for the

year 2025 were diverse, including transporting residents to dialysis during winter storms, providing tornado assistance to Pulaski County during their deadly tornado, participating in clean-up days and tire disposal events, working on IT for the courthouse, administering code enforcement, working with the solid waste committee

to develop new ordinances and guidelines regarding solid waste businesses, serving on the Scott-McCreary Environmental Coalition, and much more.

Executive assistant Joshua Stephens reported on his first months at the courthouse, noting various trainings and involvement in the Whitley County (serving McCreary) Detention Center expansion, a ceremony celebrating OVC's occupancy of the former spec building in the County's Industrial Park, and a blossoming Boys/Girls Club.

OLD CHIMNEY'S

from A4

earning as a doctor, Ralston abandoned his medical practice and donned a carbide lamp to labor underground in the mine at Barthell, this time as David Thomas Ralston. Legend has it that at some point in time, the need for a physician arose and a miner reported that a perfectly good doctor was working in the Barthell mine. Following up on this information, the Stearns Company brought Ralston from the darkness of the mine, offered him a salary he couldn't refuse, and placed him in an office near the Company headquarters. There, he flourished, setting broken bones and dispensing cough medicine and listening to the complaints of myriads of miners and their families. Soon, he developed a reputation for kindness and compassion and, most importantly, a willingness to travel to the remote parts of McCreary County to make house calls.

Ralston's familiarity with the poorest of the poor prompted him in 1925 to seek the office of Judge of McCreary County. He was elected and served from 1926 to 1930. By all accounts, his time in office was characterized by honesty and integrity and his open-door policy kept the halls of the courthouse noisy with the tapping heels of visitors to the seat of government. However, it was not to last.

In 1930, he was unseated by George C. Walker, son of the political kingmaker, Patrick Pleasant Walker. Ralston was despondent following

the defeat and moved to Casey County, Kentucky. When his wife died in 1936, Ralston became convinced that the voters of McCreary County had made a mistake in electing Walker and needed his wise counsel and governance. He declared his intent to again seek the office of County Judge and returned to McCreary County. He was campaigning in Whitley City in 1937 when he was struck by a truck while crossing Main Street and passed away in the Somerset hospital.

Many aspects of Dr. Ralston's life remain a mystery. Questions hang out there, like forbidden fruit, tantalizing historians and genealogists alike who crave answers. Unfortunately, when David Andrew Ralston, or was it Daniel Thomas Ralston, or was it David Thomas Ralston, or was it Andrew Smith, passed away, he took most of the answers to those questions with him to his grave in Casey County.

But we do know one thing for certain. By the time of Dr. Ralston's passing, finishing touches had been applied to the Cumberland Purchase Unit which absorbed Ralston's Greenwood home and acreage for inclusion in the new Cumberland National Forest. In time, the U.S. Forest Service converted his old homeplace into the Alpine Picnic Area. There, a newer version of his chimney still stands, inviting visitors to pause on their rat race of life and tune in to the voices embedded within the stones and mortar. All you have to do is be willing to listen.

FARM STANDS

from A4

superstore retailers.

For example, one of the farm stands in my area sells seedlings for container gardening in early spring. We have reached an accommodation that, in exchange for me receiving ripe peaches from their trees at no charge, they will receive the yellow-meat watermelon seeds handed down in the Oden family for more than a hundred years.

Fair swap, I'd say. It seems to me that farm stands are effective in satisfying consumer demand and convenience, plus delivering the quality and trust of serve-yourself roadside garden markets where you paid by dropping money in a basket.

Products are har-

vested and prepared on the day of sale. What is not sold goes back to the soil as fertilizer or is fed to livestock. Children are exposed to the source of their food, and we are not reliant on foreign suppliers whose prices are affected by tariffs.

From goat cheese to soap; jams and jellies, pickled peppers, and melons already thumped to assure ripeness; honey from native bees, baked goods, sweets, homemade jerky; hand-sewn knickknacks, and pumpkins in the fall, the proliferating farm stands popping up rural areas can provide what your taste buds desire and your body needs, nutrition-wise. Stop by and visit a farm stand near you. Remember, there is no charge for chatting, and it's OK to barter.

If You Find Mistakes

If you find mistakes in this publication, please consider that they are there for a reason!

We try to publish something for everyone, and some people are always looking for mistakes!

