

## **Revising the Nantahala and Pisgah Land Management Plan – Preliminary Need to Change the Existing Land Management Plan**

### **Throughout the Plan**

1. There is a fundamental need for the revised plan to address how forest management in all resource areas should be prioritized given varying levels of money and personnel likely to be available over the course of the planning cycle. Plans have historically overpromised what could be accomplished, with limited regard for fiscal realities. Yet there is also a desire to keep options open in case unexpected funds and/or capacity become available.
2. There is a need to reconsider the overall management area scheme used in the 1987 Plan.
  - The number, arrangement, boundaries of, and plan direction for the management areas need to be modified to reduce complexity and increase flexibility for restoration and creation of wildlife habitat.
  - Changed criteria for management area delineations are needed, including how species indicators are associated with management areas.
  - Management area direction needs to reflect realistic expectations regarding the amount of work that can be achieved within a planning cycle.
3. There is a need to better recognize and potentially enhance the role of the Nantahala and Pisgah NFs in supporting local economies through both commodity production, including timber and other multiple-use products, and the service-based economy that includes recreation and tourism.
4. There is a need to include plan direction regarding potential climate change impacts such as increases in storm events, flooding, and other extreme weather.
5. There is a need to incorporate opportunities for working across boundaries to manage landscapes with adjacent land managers such as state and federal partners and other land management entities.

### **Lands and Boundaries of the National Forest**

6. There is a need to ensure the revised plan direction accurately reflects the essence of the 2008 Land Adjustment Strategy, aiming for contiguity of the land base and reduction of small unmanageable tracts. There is a need for tracts acquired in the past 20 years to be assigned to the appropriate management area, and to provide plan direction for how to assign future land acquisitions.

7. Complete up-to-date marking of national forest boundaries appears unattainable; a situation that can result in problems such as timber trespasses or encroachments. There is a need to provide plan direction for boundary line maintenance that recognizes some areas are at greater risk for trespass and encroachment than others.

### **Geology, Minerals, and Energy**

8. There is a need to clarify plan direction regarding recreational metal detecting, mineral collection, and gold panning.
9. There is a need to ensure adequate direction exists for management in areas with acidic rock and other geologic hazards; including direction regarding management-related risks associated with geologic hazards.
10. There is a need to update plan direction to address potential commercial oil, gas, and hardrock mineral exploration and uses.
11. There is a need to include plan direction in anticipation of potential proposals for transmission corridors and renewable energy generation, including biomass.

### **Timber Production and Non-timber Forest Products**

12. There is a need to reconsider which areas of the national forests are available for timber management and potentially set different priorities for when and where timber harvest may occur; facilitating an appropriate level of sustainable timber production.
13. To support the traditions and culture of American Indian Tribes and other residents of western North Carolina, there is a need for the plan to provide direction for management and possible enhancement of non-timber forest products – plants used for food, fuel, medicine, crafts, etc.

### **Restoring Ecosystems and Rare Habitats**

14. Impacts from trampling, digging, and other inappropriate activities are increasingly occurring in some rare habitats. There is a need to provide direction to proactively manage, maintain, or restore rare habitats such as southern Appalachian bogs, high elevation grassy balds, and spruce-fir forests. There is a need to consider connectivity corridors and buffer zones for some rare habitats.
15. There is a need to provide direction for restoring, sustaining, and adapting the composition and structure of ecosystems over time, so they will be resilient and meet the habitat needs for a diversity of native plant and animal species. There is a need to clarify how the “natural range of variation” concept may inform restoration efforts.

16. There is a need to provide plan direction to better control the introduction and spread of non-native invasive species on the national forest, including direction that would minimize the spread of non-native plants that may increase as a result of management activities.
17. There is a need to update plan direction for prescribed fire management by: incorporating direction established by plan amendment 26 (2011) that directs an integrated resource approach to prescribed fire activities, and; including direction that allows flexibility for restoration and maintenance of ecosystems while addressing public safety and health concerns.
18. There is a need to identify priority watersheds for restoration, and bring forward plan direction that protects streams. There is a need to ensure that current direction is appropriate for addressing sedimentation concerns.
19. There is a need to reconsider the 1987 Plan's Riparian Management Area concept and possibly move away from the 100-foot default zone. Some areas may benefit from certain types of vegetation management not accounted for in the 1987 Plan, such as when streambanks are occupied by non-native invasive species or experiencing low diversity as is the case when rhododendron takes over after the loss of hemlocks. Other areas, such as known occurrences of rare species, unique habitats, or specific geologic features, may benefit from additional monitoring and possible limitations on use.
20. There is a need for management direction regarding municipal watersheds and groundwater; considering current and anticipated uses, and the anticipated ecological impacts.
21. There is a need to include direction for improving aquatic passage in streams where it is compromised. Direction should be included for restoring and expanding the range of native aquatic species and connectivity of fragmented populations.

### **Wildlife Habitat**

22. There is a need to reconsider direction for wildlife habitat diversity provided in the 1987 Plan. Specifically, there is a need to consider species in decline, game, and non-game species. New tools such as remote sensing may expand options for wildlife habitat management; incorporating more information about ecosystems and spatial and structural features, including open and closed canopy conditions and connectivity.
23. Young forest, also known as early successional habitat and referred to in the 1987 Plan as zero to 10 year old forest, is an essential habitat component for many wildlife species. The best available scientific information indicates that it is in short supply across the forests of western North Carolina; especially on national forest system lands. While the 1987 Plan directs creation of a certain amount of young forest, various limiting factors have constrained that

creation. There is a need to provide direction that will increase the amount of young forest across the landscape.

24. In addition to young forest, there is a need to provide direction to restore habitat components such as tree species composition and canopy structure in a variety of ecosystems.
25. There is a need to retain a diversity of management options including timber harvest, prescribed burning, and other vegetation management techniques to provide wildlife habitat for species that need a variety of forest habitats such as interior, edge, young, and old forest.
26. Elk introduced to the Great Smoky Mountains National Park are multiplying and expanding their range. National Forest System lands adjacent to the park may provide some of the best opportunities for range expansion if appropriate habitat is available. There is a need to provide direction for managing elk habitat in anticipation of their expanding range.

### **Scenery**

27. There is a need to institute a flexible scenery management system that allows for activities to support ecological health and creation and enhancement of diverse wildlife habitats, while retaining and enhancing pleasant and interesting scenery that supports tourism. For example, wildlife viewing is a growing use of national forests, and active forest management may increase opportunities for wildlife viewing. A flexible scenery management system can take this into account.

### **Designated Areas**

28. There is a need to clarify and update plan direction regarding designated areas including Special Interest Areas, Roan Mountain, the Appalachian Trail, Experimental Forests, and old growth areas. There is a need to update the current list of Special Interest Areas and consider other proposals for special designations.
29. There is a need to conduct an inventory and evaluation of potential additions to Wilderness and identify the eligibility of rivers for inclusion in the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System. There is a need to reconsider recommendations for wilderness and update plan direction regarding management of Wilderness Study Areas.
30. There is a need to update plan direction for managing wilderness. Particular issues to consider include overuse, special use permitting, the use of prescribed fire, and control of non-native species.

31. There is a need to clarify management direction for the congressionally designated Cradle of Forestry in America, in light of its original intent to demonstrate and provide education about forest multiple use management.
32. For Bent Creek Experimental Forest, there is a need to clarify management for continued recreation while ensuring research objectives are met. There is a need for the plan to recognize the North Carolina Arboretum, established as a long term special use within Bent Creek Experimental Forest.
33. There is a need include plan direction for Inventoried Roadless Areas, including opportunities for restoration.

### **Roads**

34. There is a need for new approaches for managing roads given the reality of limited maintenance funds combined with the public's desire for motorized access to the forest. This may include considering partnerships for road maintenance, establishing priorities for maintenance to minimize or mitigate resource damage, and promoting public safety. This could involve reducing service levels on little-used roads while retaining access for non-motorized uses. Direction could be reconsidered for when and in what circumstances roads are opened and direction for ensuring adequate drainage features in light of increasing storm events.
35. There is a need to update the plan to reduce the amount of anticipated road construction and reconstruction and include direction for closing out unneeded roads, including temporary roads and roads in environmentally or geologically hazardous locations.

### **Cultural Resources**

36. Plan direction needs to support evaluation of cultural resource sites after they are located, as well as sustainability of significant sites. When sites are located but not evaluated, ground disturbing activities or uses must be avoided. However, if evaluation indicates the site is not significant, activities and uses may be able to proceed unimpeded. Creative approaches are needed in light of limited capacity for evaluating sites.
37. There is a need for plan direction for acknowledgement and management of traditional cultural properties and sacred sites, such as the Trail of Tears.

### **Conservation Education**

38. There is a need for the plan to promote opportunities with volunteers and partners that will provide conservation education regarding national forest management, sustainability of non-timber forest products, recreation, and other multiple uses.

## **Recreation**

39. There is a need to be responsive to changing trends in regard to services, activities and types of facilities desired by the public, but balance those with fiscal reality. The trends in demographics such as the expectation for an older and more ethnically diverse population, the need to promote outdoor physical activities, especially among youth, and the desire to support local cultures and economies should all be considered in establishing a path forward for recreation management on the Nantahala and Pisgah NFs.
- Plan direction for infrastructure maintenance, design, and improvement should support the intended use and long-term sustainability; for example, trails that permit equestrian use should have trailhead parking that accommodates horse trailers.
  - Trends such as increasing day use versus overnight use and increasing interest in wildlife viewing, should be taken into account.
  - Public safety, including geologic and hydrologic concerns, potential user conflicts, conservation of natural resources, and maximum effective use of available funds should all be recognized as important considerations.
  - Improvements to barrier free accessibility should be continued.

## **Trails**

40. There is a need for the plan to better address the sustainability of the trail systems, and consider the recommendations in the Nantahala and Pisgah Trail Strategy. Plan direction could address:
- New approaches to trail maintenance given the reality of limited maintenance funds; focusing priority on trails that are financially, environmentally, and socially sustainable.
  - Ways to address the supply and demand for mountain biking and equestrian use, while not diminishing the opportunities or experiences for hikers. In some areas it may be appropriate for hiking, equestrian, and mountain bike use to occur on the same trails, while in other areas a separation of uses may be more appropriate. In some locations, restricting equestrian and mountain bike use to designated routes or areas may need to be considered.
  - Working with local communities that wish to promote certain trail systems and special events – such as for mountain biking –to support the community while not compromising other recreation users or other multiple-use objectives.
  - The use of partnerships, volunteers and user councils to assist with maintenance issues and to recommend solutions to user conflicts.
  - Assessment and management of unauthorized trails.

## **Special Uses**

41. Elements of the special use permitting process are the subject of law, regulation and policy that is not amenable to a Forest Plan decision. At same time, there is a need to update plan direction regarding special uses. Direction should be reexamined to determine if it conveys support for

appropriate special uses of the national forest that provide public benefits, including economic and other community benefits. In addition, the direction should ensure forest resource impacts are minimized, and the discretion of Forest Service decision makers is maintained. Among the areas where specific guidance may be needed are:

- Permitting for large and/or recurring events, including seasonal limitations;
- Permitting associated with the Appalachian Trail;
- Screening criteria for consideration of special use permits;
- Carrying capacity of areas versus the number of outfitters desiring permits;
- Clarifying resource protections associated with special use permitting such as road maintenance requirements for private easements.