



---

**File Code:** 1570  
**Route To:**

**Date:** January 13, 2023

**Subject:** Objection Response for the Nantahala and Pisgah National Forests Land Management Plan Revision

**To:** Objectors and Interested Persons

I am humbled by the number of people interested in their local forests, and I appreciate everyone's participation in the process. Enclosed is the final response to the objections to the Final Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) and Draft Record of Decision for the Nantahala and Pisgah National Forests Revised Land Management Plan, Southern Region. The Final EIS identifies and addresses potential impacts on the environment from the challenges that the Forests anticipate in the years ahead, such as the growth of the wildland urban interface; the spread of insects, disease, and invasive species; development pressure on adjacent private lands; unprecedented increases in recreation; and the escalating impacts from climate change. In this time of accelerated change, ensuring forest ecosystems are healthy and resilient is critical to the long-term sustainability of the diverse habitats these forests provide for wildlife and plants, and for supplying the clean water and other ecosystems benefits that the public depend on. The Nantahala and Pisgah National Forests provide environmental, social, and economic benefits to local and regional communities and across the nation, making the Forests an important and unique part of Western North Carolina. The Forests make up 27 percent of all forested land in the 18-county plan area and together total approximately 1.04 million acres.

The process of reviewing the objections and assessing opportunities for resolution has taken longer than anticipated. The inherently comprehensive and complex nature of land management plans contributed to the overall time needed for the review and the need for me to exercise my discretion to extend the time to issue my final response (36 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) 219.56(g)). There were 825 unique objections that were filed and many of the issues were similar enough in nature to consolidate into a broader range of resources and topic areas, as described in 36 CFR 219.57(b)(1). Therefore, some issues raised in the objections are not specifically cited in my response, but all objectors' concerns have been considered.

At my request, the Reviewing Officer, Deputy Regional Forester John Lint, completed an initial review of the written objections and held virtual resolution meetings on August 2- 4, 2022. Attendees included representatives from tribal governments, US Government agencies, North Carolina State agencies, collaborative groups, numerous conservation groups, other forest user groups, and outdoor sports groups, staff members for state legislature representatives, county commissioners, and other interested members of the public. The meetings were structured each day with set topics so that attendees could choose which day to attend based on subjects that were of interest to them. During the meetings, the conversations helped to clarify our understanding of the issues and provided us with ideas on additional improvements to the revised



final Land Management Plan. The meetings were recorded and posted to the Forest's website at [National Forests in North Carolina - Planning \(usda.gov\)](http://NationalForests.inNorthCarolina-Planning.usda.gov).

The enclosed final response to the objections is the outcome of a deliberative and extensive review of the concerns involving complex regulatory and management issues. This response reflects the findings from an independent review of the written submitted objections, current policies in place, the project record put together by the Nantahala and Pisgah National Forests planning team, the discussions had with all of you at the meeting, and follow-up discussions with the Responsible Official. While much of the review focused on ensuring the revised final Land Management Plan meets current law, regulations, and policies. We also considered what changes are warranted to improve upon the analysis and decision, based on all of the eligible objections that were submitted. Taking all of this into account, the response contains instructions for the Responsible Official, Forest Supervisor James Melonas, who will address and document the disposition of the instructions in the final Record of Decision prior to signing the decision and approving the revised final Land Management Plan.

The full response to the objection issues raised for the Nantahala and Pisgah National Forests revised final Land Management Plan is found in Attachment A. Each topic area includes a general description of the issue(s), the independent review team's conclusions, and where applicable, instructions to the Responsible Official.

Thank you again for your thoughtful input. I believe you have helped the Forests make the revised final Land Management Plan better. I am confident that many of you will continue working closely with the Forest Service as evidenced by your passion for the Nantahala and Pisgah National Forests. By copy of this letter, I am notifying you of my response to the objections. This response is the final determination of the U.S. Department of Agriculture [36 CFR 219.57(b)(3)].

Sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "John R. Lint (for)". The signature is written in a cursive style.

KENDERICK ARNEY  
Regional Forester

Enclosure

cc: John R. Lint, James Melonas, Debra Anderson, Dequincy Gordon, Michelle Aldridge, Stephanie L. Madson