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Nantahala and Pisgah National Forests



Final Environmental Impact Statement

for the
Land Management Plan

Appendix E: Wilderness Evaluation Process

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**Final Environmental Impact Statement
Nantahala and Pisgah National Forests
Appendix E: Wilderness Evaluation Process**

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Appendix E. Wilderness Evaluation Process

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Introduction

A part of the revision process includes identifying and evaluating lands that may be suitable for inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System (NWPS) and determining whether to recommend any such lands for wilderness designation. A description of this process can be found in the 2012 Forest Service Planning Rule and Chapter 70 of the Forest Service Land Management Planning Handbook 1909.12. This process includes the following four steps:

1. Identify and inventory all lands that may be suitable for inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System.
2. Evaluate the wilderness characteristics of each area based on a given set of criteria.
3. Determine which areas to further analyze in the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process.
4. Decide which areas, if any, to recommend for inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System.

Lands evaluated and analyzed through this process and the resulting NEPA analysis are only preliminary administrative recommendations; Congress has reserved the authority to make final decisions on wilderness designation.

This appendix includes a summary of Step 1 with full documentation of the process provided in the process paper for “Identifying and Evaluating Lands that may be Suitable for Inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System”. Steps 2 and 3 are included here in full and the final recommendations from Step 4 will be incorporated into the Record of Decision for the Revised Forest Plan.

Step 1: Identify and inventory all lands that may be suitable for inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System

The primary function of this first step is to efficiently, effectively, and transparently identify all lands in the plan area that may have wilderness characteristics as defined in the Wilderness Act.

It is important to note that areas included in this first step do not convey or require any particular kind of management. All areas identified here are carried on to the next step for a closer look at whether the areas possess wilderness characteristics. During subsequent steps, boundaries may change, or areas may be combined or divided. Some of these areas may be considered in alternatives for the forest plan revision while others may be dropped from further analysis. Management direction for areas that are inventoried, but ultimately not recommended for inclusion in the NWPS will be left to the discretion of the Responsible Official.

As one of the first forests to begin applying the 2012 Planning Rule, the planning rule directives were not yet complete when the Nantahala and Pisgah NFs began the inventory process in 2013. The inventory was developed over a year and a half, and was adjusted twice in response to two rounds of public engagement in spring 2014 and fall 2014. It was revised again after the release of final agency directives in early 2015. The inventory includes forest lands that meet the criteria on the basis of size, and do not include certain types of roads or other improvements.

As a result of refinements to earlier versions of the inventory, the October 2015 inventory is broad and inclusive, consistent with Forest Service policy and the intent of the Eastern Wilderness Act and reflects many but not all of the areas recommended for consideration by the public. The October 2015 inventory is approximately 150,000 acres larger than the initial version seen by the public because it removes road

buffers, removes minimum width criteria, includes system roads that are gated and closed to the public, and includes areas that can be passively restored. Detailed discussion of the changes of the inventory process between spring 2014, fall 2014, and October 2015 are described in the process paper for “Identifying and Evaluating Lands that may be Suitable for Inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System.”

The following areas were identified in this first stage as lands that may have wilderness characteristics as defined in the Wilderness Act. This step is intended to be reasonably broad and inclusive and to identify lands that may be suitable, so that they can be further evaluated through the public involvement process. Inclusion of lands in this first stage is not a designation that conveys or requires a particular kind of management.

Name	Ranger District	County	Acreage
Ash Cove	Tusquitee	Cherokee	5,885
Bald Mountain	Appalachian	Madison	11,616
Barkers Creek (Ext. D)	Nantahala	Macon	1,556
Bearwallow	Appalachian	Yancey	4,131
Black Mountains	Appalachian	Yancey	12,473
Bluff Mountain	Appalachian	Madison	3,335
Boteler Peak	Tusquitee	Clay	10,524
Cantrell Top	Tusquitee	Cherokee	3,664
Cedar Rock Mountain	Pisgah	Transylvania	8,681
Cheoah Bald	Cheoah	Swain, Graham	9,400
Cherry Cove (Ext. E)	Tusquitee	Clay	1,159
Chunky Gal (Ext. B)	Tusquitee	Clay, Macon	7,785
Craggy	Appalachian	Buncombe	10,653
Daniel Ridge	Pisgah	Transylvania	11,695
Deep Creek/Avey Creek Ext. 2	Cheoah	Graham	2,313
Dobson Knob Ext. B	Grandfather	McDowell, Burke	11,763
Ellicott Rock West Ext.	Nantahala	Macon	824
Fishhawk Mountain	Nantahala	Macon	5,669
Harper Creek	Grandfather	Caldwell, Avery	7,432
Harper Creek Ext (Sugar Knob)	Grandfather	Burke	6,175
Highlands of Roan #2	Appalachian	Avery, Mitchell	5,217
Jarrett Creek	Grandfather	McDowell	8,972
Joyce Kilmer-Slickrock Ext. 1	Cheoah	Graham	3,553
Joyce Kilmer-Slickrock Ext. 4	Cheoah	Graham	326
Laurel Mountain	Pisgah	Henderson, Transylvania	10,946

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Name	Ranger District	County	Acreage
Linville Gorge Addition	Grandfather	Burke	2,844
Linville Pinnacle Ext.	Grandfather	Burke	620
Lost Cove	Grandfather	Avery	5,934
Mackey Mountain	Grandfather	McDowell	14,985
Middle Prong Ext.	Pisgah	Haywood	6,676
Nolichucky Gorge	Appalachian	Yancey	2,465
Overflow Creek	Nantahala	Macon	3,901
Panthertown Valley (1)	Nantahala	Jackson	4,395
Piercy Mountain	Tusquitee	Macon	9,109
Pigeon River	Appalachian	Haywood	6,105
Santeetlah Headwaters	Cheoah	Graham	4,448
Shining Rock Exts.	Pisgah	Haywood	4,968
Siler Bald	Nantahala	Macon	6,280
Slide Hollow	Appalachian	Avery	199
Snowbird	Cheoah	Graham	11,560
Southern Nantahala Ext.	Nantahala	Macon	4,298
South Mills River	Pisgah	Transylvania, Henderson	17,105
Steels Creek	Grandfather	Burke	5,841
Tellico Bald	Nantahala	Macon	12,525
Terrapin Mountain	Nantahala	Jackson, Macon	5,441
Tusquitee Bald	Tusquitee	Macon, Cherokee, Clay	29,156
Unicoi Mtns / Upper Bald River	Tusquitee	Cherokee	8,952
Upper Wilson Creek	Grandfather	Avery, Caldwell	6,372
Wesser Bald	Nantahala	Swain, Macon	6,642
Woods Mountain	Grandfather	McDowell	12,701
Yellow Creek Mountains	Cheoah	Graham	4,444
Yellowhammer Branch Ext. 3	Cheoah	Graham	1,207

The inventory total of the areas listed above is 364,920 acres.

Step 2: Evaluation

As required by Forest Service planning policy, all areas included in the first step of the analysis were evaluated for their wilderness characteristics (Step 2). The primary function of the evaluation step is to evaluate the wilderness characteristics of the lands included in the inventory, using criteria set forth in the Wilderness Act of 1964 as described in the Wilderness Recommendation Handbook (FSH 1909.12, Chapter 70, Section 72). The evaluation considered the characteristics of each area including:

1. The degree to which the area generally appears to be affected primarily by the forces of nature, with the imprints of man's work substantially unnoticeable (**apparent naturalness**).
2. The degree to which the area has outstanding **opportunities for solitude** or for a **primitive and unconfined** type of recreation.
3. Evaluate how areas smaller than 5,000 acres are of **sufficient size** to make their preservation and use in an unimpaired condition practicable.
4. Evaluate the degree to which the area contains ecological, geological, or other features of scientific, educational, scenic, or historical value (**unique features**). These values are not required for recommendation, but they should be identified and evaluated.
5. Is it possible to **manage** the area to preserve its wilderness characteristics?

The Nantahala and Pisgah NFs plan revision team developed questions and measures to address each of these five criteria to provide a consistent way to evaluate each area identified in the first step for wilderness characteristics in a comparable manner. The form used to gather input on evaluation considerations is included in the project record as part of the evaluation step.

Public input, geospatial analysis, and Forest Service knowledge of areas was used to inform the evaluation of wilderness characteristics.

Public Input for the Evaluation

Public input was gathered on the inventory phase in April 2014, following public meetings in the fall of 2014, as well as at the start of the evaluation phase in fall 2015. This input was considered in the original development of the evaluation narratives that were shared in July 2016. In many cases, public comments provided during the inventory of areas in 2014 (Step 1) were relevant to the evaluation (Step 2), so they were retained and considered during the evaluation of areas. For example, comments regarding closed roads and past vegetation management were provided during the inventory step but were considered as factors affecting naturalness during the evaluation.

In October 2015, the Forest Service notified the public that inventory maps were available on our “Interactive GIS map and Storyboard” website at <http://www.fs.usda.gov/goto/nfsnc/nprevision>. The public was asked to provide information to help document the wilderness characteristics of the areas identified in the first step of the process by responding to specific evaluation questions. The wilderness evaluation process and inventory maps were shared at public meetings held in Asheville and Franklin, NC, in November and December 2015, and feedback was encouraged by mid-December. From January 2016 to May 2016, the forests received and reviewed additional public input on the inventory areas.

In July 2016, the Evaluation Report was shared with the public along with initial identification of Areas for Analysis in the Forest Plan DEIS by Alternative. The public was asked to provide feedback on the Evaluation report as well as the initial list of areas identified for analysis (Step 3). Public comments included both site specific comments of individual areas as well as comments on the evaluation process and documentation of wilderness characteristics.

Based on public comments that were received in 2016 and 2017, the Evaluation Report was updated and shared with the public in 2017. Updates to the report include:

- Providing narrative in the introduction that describes how individual wilderness characteristics were evaluated;
- Clarifying consideration of impacts to naturalness, including adding an appendix that describes assumptions about the effects to naturalness from recent timber harvest, wildlife openings, roads, trails, nonnative invasive species, and other past management;
- Reviewing and updating narratives for consistency in analysis of impacts to naturalness, including clarifying the pervasiveness of impacts in each area;
- Updating area narratives to identify the presence of threatened and endangered species, and rare and unique habitats when raised in public comments;
- Updating area maps to clarify that we evaluated each full inventory area by showing the complete area map, and not reducing the boundaries in size during this step;
- Revising narrative conclusion paragraphs to be a summary instead and removing statements regarding whether the area possesses overall wilderness characteristics.

The intent of the evaluation is to clearly and efficiently describe and document the wilderness characteristics associated with each area.

Summary of Public Input

The Forest Service received extensive public input including individual unique comments, as well as form letter submissions. Comments were received through the forest plan website, email, and postal mail during the comment period.

Public input generally fell into the following categories:

1. Views on recommending additional wilderness areas.
 - a. Stakeholders in favor of recommending additional wilderness areas generally cited an area's natural qualities, opportunities for primitive recreation, or other unique features of value.
 - b. Stakeholders opposed to recommending additional wilderness areas generally cited the lack of wilderness characteristics in areas with recent management activities, existing or potential wildlife habitat needs, mountain bike trails, or other improvements.
2. Wilderness inventory and evaluation process.
 - a. Some people expressed concern that the evaluation process did not consider management activities such as timber harvests older than 20 years age as a factor in apparent naturalness.
 - b. Some wanted to see The Wilderness Society's North Carolina Mountain Treasures areas in the inventory and evaluation.
 - c. Some stakeholders were concerned about including areas with mountain biking trails as being evaluated for wilderness characteristics.
 - d. Many stakeholders commented that the evaluations inappropriately applied conclusions regarding wilderness characteristics and inappropriately refined boundaries in the Evaluation Report. Some felt that the evaluations did not sufficiently include positive wilderness characteristics and the benefits of recommending areas as wilderness.

3. Impacts or management issues from additional wilderness designations.
 - a. Interest in designating more wilderness as a way to ensure protection of forest resources.
 - b. Concerns that additional wilderness would limit areas on the forest open to multiple-use recreation (including mountain biking, hunting, and special uses).
 - c. Comments that additional wilderness would affect local economies.
 - d. Comments that additional wilderness would affect wildlife by limiting the development of habitats with mechanical equipment or conversely, by providing mature forest habitat.
 - e. Concerns that additional wilderness would affect the ability of people who are disabled or elderly to access the forest.

How Public Input Was Incorporated

Information from the public was sorted by evaluation area and considered in the development of the narrative for each area. Generally, information was addressed in the following ways:

Wilderness Characteristics

Any new and relevant information regarding the wilderness characteristics of a specific area was reviewed by Forest Service staff and then incorporated into the evaluation narratives where appropriate.

Apparent Naturalness

Multiple factors were considered when evaluating the degree to which the area generally appears to be affected primarily by the forces of nature. Factors include ecological conditions that would normally be associated with the area, absent human intervention. Factors that represent a departure from natural conditions were considered to detract from naturalness, including: recent timber harvests, closed roads that are visible on the landscape, culverts, trail improvements such as constructed railings, bridges or boardwalks, highly impacted trails, cleared utility corridors, large infestations of non-native invasive species, maintained wildlife fields, and linear wildlife openings. Assumptions regarding impacts to naturalness are explained in further detail in Appendix B of this report.

Outstanding opportunities for solitude or a primitive and unconfined type of recreation

Factors that were considered when evaluating outstanding opportunities for solitude or a primitive and unconfined type of recreation include the degree to which the topography of the area isolates forest users from surrounding lands, pervasive sights and sounds from lands adjacent to the area (including highways and railroads), and recreation opportunities which occur outside of developed areas and are unencumbered by surrounding lands.

Unique and Outstanding Qualities

Factors considered when evaluating unique and outstanding qualities of an area included the presence of rare species, exceptional waterfalls, geology, or vistas. Special Interest Areas, State Natural Heritage Areas, and unique cultural sites were also noted where they occur.

Management

Factors that were considered when evaluating the ability to manage the area as wilderness included the management of adjacent lands, the current legally established rights or uses within the area, and acres of private inholding within the area.

Current uses that are not compatible with wilderness management

The evaluation narrative for each area contains a summary of the current uses within the area. The presence or absence of a current use does not alone affect the findings of wilderness characteristics. The evaluation considered only whether areas had wilderness characteristics, and did not address the effects of wilderness management on other forest resources or programs, nor did it address restoration opportunities to improve wilderness characteristics. Effects of recommending areas, including management trade-offs as well as ecosystem benefits, are analyzed as part of the EIS and are discussed in the documentation of the "Analysis step" in this appendix.

Management of Recommended Wilderness

The revised forest plan will provide management direction for all recommended wildernesses. When developing plan components for recommended wilderness areas, the Forest Supervisor has discretion to implement a range of management options. All plan components applicable to a recommended area must protect and maintain the characteristics that provide the basis for wilderness recommendation (36 CFR §219.10). In addition, the plan may include one or more plan components for a recommended wilderness area that:

1. Enhance the ecological and social characteristics that provide the basis for wilderness designations;
2. Continue existing uses, only if such uses do not prevent the protection and maintenance of the social and ecological characteristics that provide the basis for wilderness designation;
3. Alter existing uses, subject to valid existing rights; or
4. Eliminate existing uses, except those uses subject to valid existing rights.

Other Factors and Analysis Inputs

Many comments raised by the public are not applicable to Step 2 of the evaluation process but rather, are more relevant to Step 3, the analysis phase which will analyze the effects of recommending or not recommending an area for wilderness. Comments on the trade-offs of managing areas for wilderness are considered by the Forest Supervisor during the analysis phase.

Evaluation Findings

In the pages that follow, the areas identified in the inventory step are sorted alphabetically by ranger district. Each evaluation narrative consists of a general description of the area, a discussion of the area's wilderness characteristics, the manageability of the area, a data table that quantifies exiting condition, and an area map.

Along with public input, area evaluations were informed by geospatial analysis, Google Earth imagery, and local knowledge of the areas. In some cases, geospatial data was not the most accurate representation of on the ground conditions and field knowledge was relied upon for the evaluation. Vegetation types that are quantified in the data tables for each area are based on modeled potential natural vegetation and are not always representative of vegetation that is present on the ground. Maps

contained in this document are based on FS spatial datasets which are the most current and complete data available. GIS data and product accuracy may vary.

The potential extensions to Shining Rock Wilderness that were included in the inventory as one area have been evaluated as two separate areas in this evaluation document – the Sam Knob Extension and the Graveyard Fields Extension. This brings the total number of areas that were identified in the first step of the process from 52 areas to 53 areas that were evaluated.

Appalachian Ranger District

Name: Bald Mountain

Acres: 11,616 acres

Description of Area

Location & Access

The Bald Mountain area is on the Appalachian Ranger District of the Pisgah National Forest. It is located north of Hot Springs in the Shelton Laurel community of Madison County, and lies on the North Carolina-Tennessee State line adjacent to the Cherokee National Forest. Access to the area is from Hickey Fork Road (NFSR465), Big Rocky Road (NFSR466), Big Creek Road (NFSR111), and Camp Creek Bald Road (NFSR42). Area trails accessed from these roads include the Appalachian National Scenic Trail, Hickey Fork Trail, White Oak Trail, Jerry Miller Trail, Fork Ridge Trail, and Green Ridge Trail.

Surroundings

The Bald Mountain area's northwestern and northeastern boundaries are mostly adjacent to the Cherokee National Forest, with a few pockets of private ownership. The southwestern boundary and about two-thirds of the southeastern boundary abut private land; the remaining third is bordered by the Pisgah NF. The area on the adjacent Cherokee NF includes approximately 11,744 acres of the Bald Mountain Inventoried Roadless Area, which is managed for backcountry and scenic areas, but was not recommended for wilderness designation in the 2004 Forest Plan revision. Along the ridge to the northwest is Camp Creek Bald fire tower and communication site, and an open road to Jones Meadow. Private lands to the southeast in the Shelton Laurel community are forested or in residential/agricultural uses.

Topography & Vegetation

The Bald Mountains are made up of ridges that trend from the southwest to the northeast. The area is surrounded by high-elevation ridges to the west (along the NC/TN line), north, and a portion of the east. The southern end skirts the valley occupied by NC 208, and the majority of the eastern boundary weaves through valleys, including the East Prong Hickey Fork. Elevations range from 1,930 feet in the south along Pounding Mill Branch up to 4,844 feet on Camp Creek Bald and 4,840 feet on Green Ridge Knob on the northern tip of the area. Dominant ecozones include acidic cove, rich cove, mesic oak, pine-oak/heath, with some white pine.

Current Uses

The Bald Mountain area is managed primarily for backcountry recreation and the Appalachian Trail corridor. The Appalachian Trail has relatively high use during the spring and fall through-hiker season. A small portion of the area is also managed for timber and wildlife. Approximately 94% of the area is identified as an Inventoried Roadless Area, and there are about 30 miles of hike-only trail in the area that offer multiple loops with the Appalachian Trail. There are 11.5 acres of maintained linear wildlife openings within the area, which lie on 2.8 miles of low maintenance level NFS road. Hunting as well as non-timber forest products collection of medicinal herbs and ginseng occurs in the area.

Evaluation of Wilderness Characteristics

Apparent Naturalness

Most of the Bald Mountain area has a predominantly natural appearing condition. There is evidence of old logging roads, and the 2.8 miles of low maintenance level NFS road now used as linear wildlife openings; but these modifications represent a small fraction of the area and do not detract from the natural appearing condition overall.

Opportunities for Solitude or Primitive & Unconfined Recreation

The Bald Mountain area offers many opportunities for solitude. Views are primarily to the east toward the Pisgah NF and scattered rural residential/agricultural lands in the Shelton Laurel community. Along the Appalachian Trail on the high ridge, Camp Creek Bald fire tower and communication site are visible; as well as gravel roads and maintained fields. Although the towers are visible from many locations along the Appalachian Trail, their impacts to solitude are not pervasive across the whole area. Visitor encounters can be high on the Appalachian Trail during spring and fall through-hiker season, but use is moderate most of the year. Other trails in the area receive relatively light use, so overall impacts to solitude from user encounters is low.

The area offers many opportunities for primitive and unconfined recreation. Although the area is rather long and narrow in configuration, which does confine users somewhat in the southwest, there are multiple hiking trail loops in the northeastern section. The northeastern section also provides a connection to the Cherokee National Forest's 11,744 acre Bald Mountain Inventoried Roadless Area which provides for primitive and unconfined recreation. In addition to hiking and backpacking, other forms of primitive recreation in the area include hunting, fishing, rock climbing, and wildlife viewing. There are no highly developed trails or mountain bike trails in the area.

Other Values - Unique or Outstanding Qualities

Within the context of the Southern Appalachian Mountains, most of the Bald Mountain area is not unique or outstanding. However, the high ridge along the state line has scenic rock outcrops and cliff formations, including Whiterock Cliff and Baxter Cliff. Many locations within the area have forests with old growth characteristics. Two State Natural Heritage Areas are located partially or wholly within this area.

Size & Manageability

The Bald Mountain area is adjacent to the Cherokee NF's 11,744 acre Bald Mountain Inventoried Roadless Area which enhances the manageability of the area for wilderness characteristics and creates a contiguous roadless area of over 23,000 acres. The Appalachian Trail separates the area from the Cherokee NF Inventoried Roadless Area in Tennessee and forms the entire northwestern boundary. A combination of property boundaries and open roads form all other area boundaries.

Summary

The Bald Mountain area is predominately natural appearing, with opportunities for solitude and primitive and unconfined recreation. The presence of a few low maintenance level NFS roads maintained as linear wildlife openings detract from apparent naturalness, but only in their immediate vicinity. The Camp Creek Bald fire tower and communication site detracts from remoteness and solitude where visible, but those impacts are not pervasive throughout the area. Impacts to solitude from other surrounding land uses or uses within the area are negligible. There are many opportunities for primitive types of recreation, and the area is adjacent to a large Inventoried Roadless Area on the Cherokee NF.

Quantitative Summary of Items/Activities within the Bald Mountain Area

Disclaimer: Information was generated from FS spatial datasets. All figures are approximate.

Description of Area	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Spruce-Fir Ecozone:	acres	0.1
Northern Hardwood Ecozone:	acres	392.6
High Elevation Red Oak Ecozone:	acres	822.0
Acidic Cove Ecozone:	acres	2,993.0
Rich Cove Ecozone:	acres	1,744.1
Mesic Oak Ecozone:	acres	3,491.3
Dry-Mesic Oak Ecozone:	acres	253.1
Dry Oak Ecozone:	acres	410.2
Pine-Oak/Heath Ecozone:	acres	1,481.6
Shortleaf Pine Ecozone:	acres	16.9
Alluvial Forest Ecozone:	acres	0.2

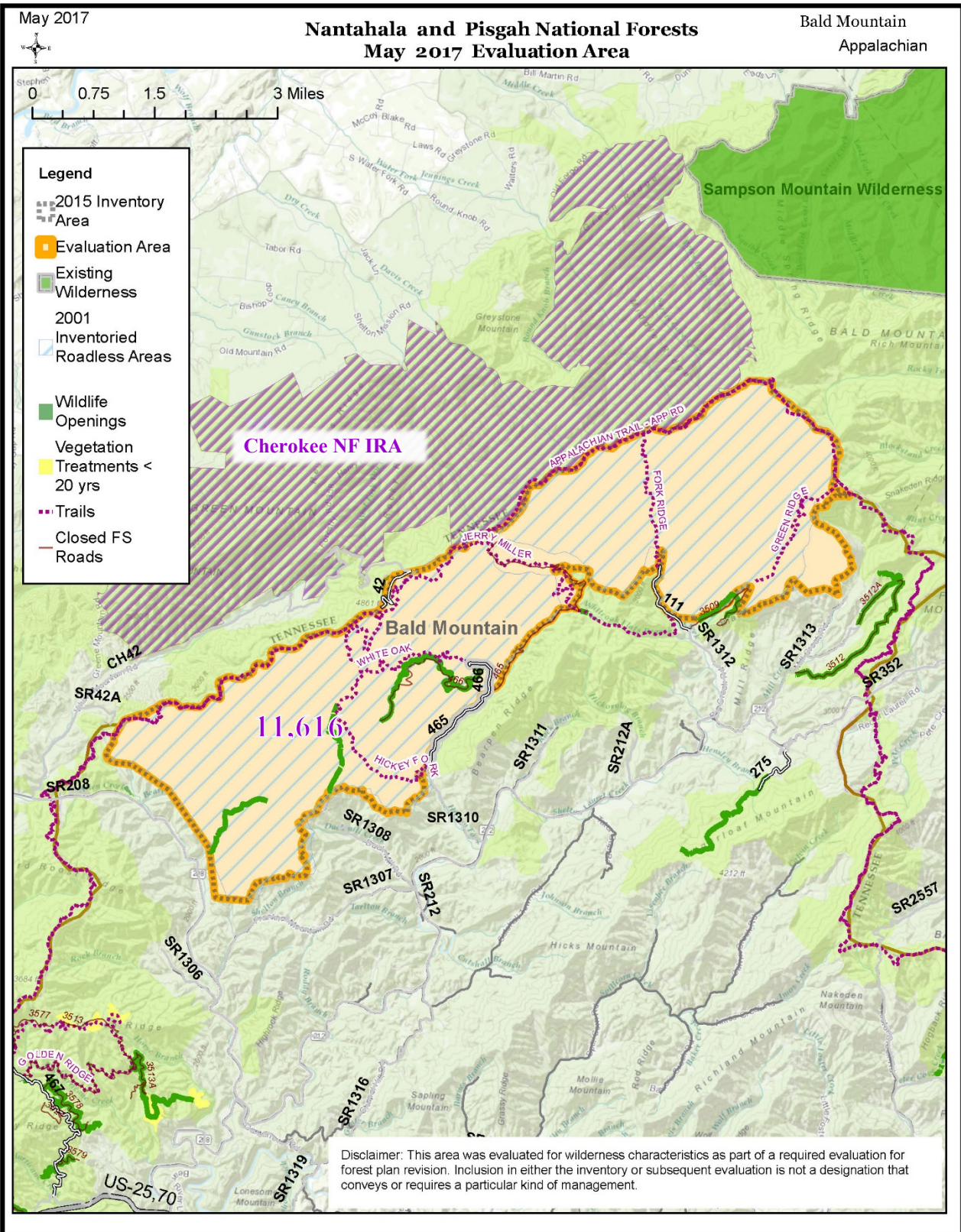
Apparent Naturalness	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Maintenance Level 1 National Forest System Roads:	miles	2.8
Closed Maintenance Level 2 National Forest System Roads:	miles	0
Road Stream Crossings, Bridge:	number	0
Road Stream Crossings, Other:	number	6
Trail Stream Crossings, Bridge:	number	2
Vegetation Management, 0-20 years old:	acres	0
Vegetation Management, 21-40 years old:	acres	19.5
Maintained Wildlife Fields (may overlap Bald Management Area):	acres	11.1
Existing Wilderness Study Area (WSA):	acres	0
Existing Inventoried Roadless Area (IRA may overlap WSA):	acres	10,963.2

Solitude or Primitive & Unconfined Recreation	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Current Backcountry Management Area (may overlap WSA & IRA):	acres	8,944.3
Inventoried Primitive Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) Setting:	acres	0
Inventoried Semi-Primitive Non-Motorized ROS Setting:	acres	6,393.5

	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Solitude or Primitive & Unconfined Recreation		
Inventoried Semi-Primitive Motorized ROS Setting (buffer of adjacent roads):	acres	3,331.2
Inventoried Roded Natural ROS Setting (buffer of adjacent roads):	acres	1,888.1
National Forest System Trail, Hike-only Allowed Use:	miles	29.3
National Forest System Trail, Hike-Bike Allowed Use:	miles	0
National Forest System Trail, Hike-Horse Allowed Use:	miles	0
National Forest System Trail, Hike-Bike-Horse Allowed Use:	miles	0

	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Unique & Outstanding Features		
Current Special Interest Management Area (scenic, geologic, botanical, zoological):	acres	0
Current Designated Wild & Scenic River Corridor (1/4 mile each side):	acres	0
Current Eligible Wild & Scenic River Corridor (1/4 mile each side):	acres	0
Research Natural Area:	acres	0

	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Size & Manageability		
Area, Total:	acres	11,615.9
Private/Non-Federal Inholdings, Total:	acres	0
Private/Non-Federal Inholdings, Count:	number	0
Outstanding or Reserved Subsurface Mineral Rights:	acres	0
Current Bald Management Area:	acres	0
Forest Research Plots, Count:	number	0



Name: Bearwallow

Acres: 4,131 acres

Description of Area

Location & Access

The Bearwallow area, located in the Black Mountains of Yancey County, lies within the Appalachian Ranger District of the Pisgah NF. The area is bounded by North Carolina 128 (NC128) to the west, Mount Mitchell State Park to the northwest, Commissary Ridge and Whiteside Ridge to the north, National Forest System Road 472 (NFSR472) following along the South Toe River to the east, and the Blue Ridge Parkway to the south and southwest. The area is most easily accessed from Mount Mitchell State Park. Additional access to the area is from Buncombe Horse Range Trail (NFST191) off of NC128 on the west side or NFSR472 on the east side (where NFSR 5543, a maintenance-level 1 road enters the evaluation area).

Surroundings

The Bearwallow area lies south of the Balsam Cone Inventoried Roadless Area but is separated by a cleared utility line that runs to Mount Mitchell. The northwestern boundary is adjacent to Mount Mitchell State Park; northern and eastern boundaries are adjacent to other national forest system lands; and the southern and southwestern boundaries are adjacent to the Blue Ridge Parkway. Mount Mitchell State Park is a highly developed recreation area that includes a variety of public facilities such as paved roads and parking lots, campgrounds, visitor information, public restrooms, and a restaurant. Another developed recreation area lies just over Whiteside Ridge to the northeast. This adjacent area includes two Forest Service campgrounds (Briar Bottom Group Campground and Black Mountain Campground), Lost Cove Picnic Area, and a system of popular trails (River Loop Trail, Setrock Creek Trail, Devil's Den Nature Trail, and the Mountains to Sea Trail). A helicopter landing area, Neals Creek Helispot, lies to the northeast of the area. To the south, portions of the Blue Ridge Parkway are visible from the area.

Beyond NFSR472, to the southeast, lies Lost Cove Ridge; beyond SR128 to the west lies the Big Tom Wilson Preserve; beyond the Blue Ridge Parkway to the southwest is the City of Asheville watershed.

Topography & Vegetation

The Bearwallow area is part of the Black Mountains, the highest mountain range in the Eastern United States. The western boundary follows along the crest of the Black Mountain range following NC128 which connects the Blue Ridge Parkway to Mount Mitchell State Park. The area is formed by a system of ridges that run primarily in a south-easterly direction, from the crest down towards the South Toe River Valley. Most of the area has steep and rugged terrain, especially near the high ridges. Elevations range from 3,100 feet near the South Toe River to 5,800 feet near the Mount Mitchell State Park boundary.

The forest type is comprised of northern hardwoods and spruce-fir. Other ecozones within the area include acidic cove, rich cove high-elevation red-oak, and mesic oak.

Current Uses

The entire area is within the Bearwallow Inventoried Roadless Area and is currently managed for backcountry recreation. The area is popular for hunting, with seasonal access from the South Toe River Road (NFSR472). There are also fishing opportunities in areas streams.

Other uses in the area include hiking, backpacking, horseback riding, scenery and nature viewing, backcountry exploration, nature study, and gathering forest products such as galax.

Evaluation of Wilderness Characteristics

Apparent Naturalness

The area has been logged in the past and evidence of old logging roads and railroad grades are still visible on the landscape. Many of the old roads have recovered and are not obvious to the average forest visitor. The east side of the area contains a 0.6 mile maintenance level 1 National Forest System (NFS) road that is also maintained as a linear wildlife opening. There are approximately five acres of maintained wildlife openings in the area. Neither the road nor wildlife fields are pervasive throughout the area. Infrastructure within the area includes seven road stream crossings, three of which are bridges.

Opportunities for Solitude or Primitive & Unconfined Recreation

Approximately 89% of the area is managed for backcountry recreation. The area contains two hike-only trails, totaling 3.6 miles in length: Bald Knob Ridge Trail (NFST186) which runs across the southern tip of the area and has two Trailhead Parking areas on SR128 and NFSR472; and a portion of River Loop Trail (NFST200) in the northeast corner, which leads to the adjacent developed recreation area in the vicinity of Briar Bottom Group Camp. Mount Mitchell Trail (NFST190, which is coincident with the Mountains to Sea Trail, MST-NFST440) runs along part of the northern boundary. There is one hike-horse trail approximately nine miles in length within the area; the Buncombe Horse Range Trail, NFST191 (also coincident with the MST-NFST440) crosses the area east to west and then continues in a northerly direction along the western edge of the area, following along an old railroad grade. Trailhead parking for NFST191 is located at the boundary along NFSR472.

The area has opportunities for primitive and unconfined recreation, although some of the area trails are very popular and have the potential to diminish opportunities for solitude. In addition, adjacent developed recreation, surrounding road systems and trailhead parking may adversely impact solitude in some areas with sights and sounds of civilization.

Other Values - Unique or Outstanding Qualities

The Bearwallow area contains 288 acres in a designated Special Interest Area which has national significance for botanical, zoological and geomorphic features. In addition, one of the best quality composites of high elevation forests in the southern Appalachians is found here. Several rare plant species occur in the area including mountain paper birch and Carolina star moss. This area provides a large expanse of high elevation habitat for associated high elevation plant and animal species.

The area's highest elevations originate along the Mount Mitchell State Park boundary in the northwestern corner of the area. Like the high-elevation ecosystem on Mt. Mitchell, the remnant spruce-fir forests of the area are unique and outstanding.

Views in this area are expansive, from the South Toe River valley toward the mountain peaks, as well as views from the Blue Ridge Parkway into the area.

Size & Manageability

The Bearwallow area boundaries are relatively consolidated, with several small protrusions. At 4,131 acres, the Bearwallow Area is less than 5,000 acres, reducing the ability to manage the area for preservation and use in an unimpaired condition. Area boundaries are well defined by open roads and a cleared utility corridor. Although the area lies directly south of the Black Mountain area which is being evaluated for wilderness characteristics, it is separated from that area by a utility powerline and access roads.

Summary

Apparent naturalness of the Bearwallow area is impacted by evidence of past and current human infrastructure, including old logging roads, maintained wildlife openings and seven roaded stream crossings. The area has opportunities for primitive and unconfined recreation, although some area trails are very popular and have the potential to diminish opportunities for solitude. The heavy visitor use on the trail system and the nearby parking areas and developed recreation affect solitude. The area's relatively small size and impacts from open roads along the boundaries reduces the ability to manage the area for preservation in an unimpaired condition.

Quantitative Summary of Items/Activities within the Bearwallow Area

Disclaimer: Information was generated from FS spatial datasets. All figures are approximate.

Description of Area	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Spruce-Fir Ecozone:	acres	1,843.1
Northern Hardwood Ecozone:	acres	515.9
High Elevation Red Oak Ecozone:	acres	278.2
Acidic Cove Ecozone:	acres	764.6
Rich Cove Ecozone:	acres	373.4
Mesic Oak Ecozone:	acres	207.2
Dry-Mesic Oak Ecozone:	acres	0.2
Dry Oak Ecozone:	acres	48.9
Pine-Oak/Heath Ecozone:	acres	96.6
Shortleaf Pine Ecozone:	acres	0
Alluvial Forest Ecozone:	acres	0.0

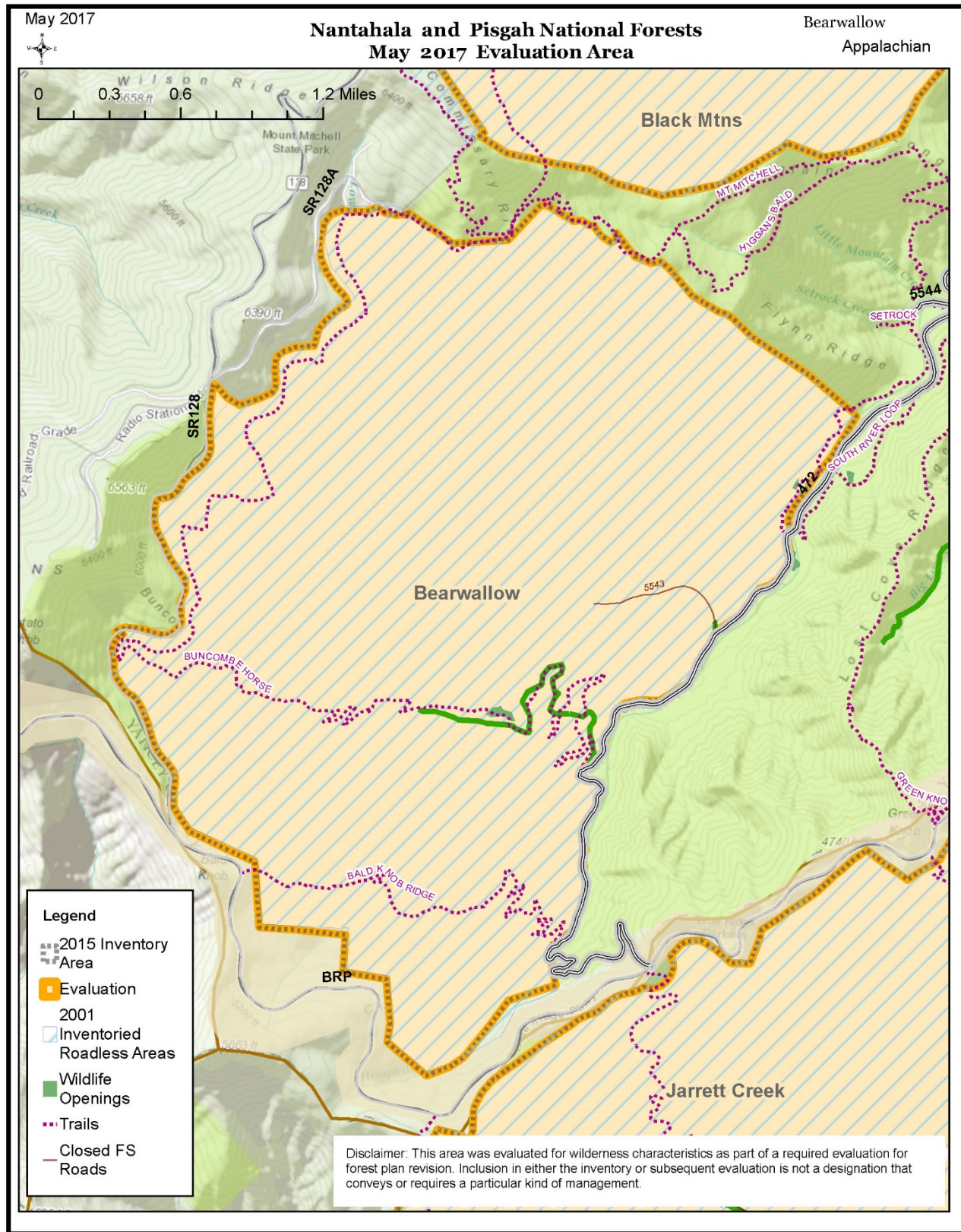
Apparent Naturalness	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Maintenance Level 1 National Forest System Roads:	miles	0.6
Closed Maintenance Level 2 National Forest System Roads:	miles	0
Road Stream Crossings, Bridge:	number	3
Road Stream Crossings, Other:	number	4
Trail Stream Crossings, Bridge:	number	0
Vegetation Management, 0-20 years old:	acres	0
Vegetation Management, 21-40 years old:	acres	0
Maintained Wildlife Fields (may overlap Bald Management Area):	acres	5.6
Existing Wilderness Study Area (WSA):	acres	0
Existing Inventoried Roadless Area (IRA may overlap WSA):	acres	4,093.0

Solitude or Primitive & Unconfined Recreation	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Current Backcountry Management Area (may overlap WSA & IRA):	acres	3,684.8
Inventoried Primitive Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) Setting:	acres	0
Inventoried Semi-Primitive Non-Motorized ROS Setting:	acres	1,604.9

	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Solitude or Primitive & Unconfined Recreation		
Inventoried Semi-Primitive Motorized ROS Setting (buffer of adjacent roads):	acres	228.1
Inventoried Roded Natural ROS Setting (buffer of adjacent roads):	acres	2,296.7
National Forest System Trail, Hike-only Allowed Use:	miles	3.6
National Forest System Trail, Hike-Bike Allowed Use:	miles	0
National Forest System Trail, Hike-Horse Allowed Use:	miles	8.9
National Forest System Trail, Hike-Bike-Horse Allowed Use:	miles	0

	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Unique & Outstanding Features		
Current Special Interest Management Area (scenic, geologic, botanical, zoological):	acres	287.9
Current Designated Wild & Scenic River Corridor (1/4 mile each side):	acres	0
Current Eligible Wild & Scenic River Corridor (1/4 mile each side):	acres	0
Research Natural Area:	acres	0

	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Size & Manageability		
Area, Total:	acres	4,130.5
Private/Non-Federal Inholdings, Total:	acres	0
Private/Non-Federal Inholdings, Count:	number	0
Outstanding or Reserved Subsurface Mineral Rights:	acres	0
Current Bald Management Area:	acres	0
Forest Research Plots, Count:	number	0



Name: Black Mountains

Acres: 12,473 acres

Description of Area

Location & Access

The Black Mountains area is on the Appalachian Ranger District of the Pisgah NF, southeast of Burnsville, NC, in Yancey County. The area lies immediately north of Mount Mitchell State Park, and is accessed via trailheads in the Park, and on State and National Forest System (NFS) roads to the south, east, and north. These trailheads are at Bowlen's Creek, Colbert's Creek, South Toe River, Black Mountain Campground, NC128, NFSR472, and other locations. These trailheads access Black Mountain Crest Trail, Buncombe Range Horse Trail, Mount Mitchell Trail, and Mountain to Sea National Recreation Trail; all of which pass through the area.

Surroundings

Mount Mitchell State Park borders the area to the south and southwest. The Park is managed for recreation and ecological preservation, but does have roads, structures, communications sites, and high visitation from spring through fall. To the east are national forest lands managed for timber, wildlife, and developed recreation, as well as private lands with mixed agricultural/residential uses, a golf resort, and a private airstrip. To the west are forested private lands, and to the northwest are mixed agricultural/residential uses and a gravel quarry. Just south of the area is a cleared power transmission corridor servicing Mount Mitchell State Park. This corridor separates the Black Mountain area from the Bearwallow inventory area to the south.

Topography & Vegetation

The Black Mountains area is characterized by a high-elevation ridge known as the Black Mountain "Crest" extending north from Mount Mitchell, which at 6,684 feet elevation is the highest point east of the Mississippi River. It is a place of natural beauty, with ice-age remnants of spruce-fir forest along its ridgetops, interspersed with heath balds and scattered high-elevation rocky summits. Within the drainages, two subtypes of northern hardwood forest occur at 4,000 feet elevation, and an extensive acidic cove forest occurs down to the lowermost slopes. From 4,000 to 5,000 feet elevation the convex side slopes support high elevation red oak forests, and at lower elevations these slopes support montane oak hickory forest. All of these forest types have scattered large trees and high structural diversity, some have old-growth characteristics. Plant composition within these communities is diverse.

Current Uses

The Black Mountains area is primarily managed for backcountry recreation across most of the area, and preservation and enhancement of the spruce-fir and northern hardwoods ecozones within the Middle Creek Research Natural Area. There is also a botanical special interest area within the area, and most of the area was identified as an Inventoried Roadless Area in 2001.

The area contains no vegetation management treatments less than 20 years old, and less than an acre of maintained wildlife fields. However, there are several plantations of yellow birch, red spruce, and Norway spruce dating back to the mid-1920s. Approximately two miles of low maintenance level NFS roads enter from the east, most of which are along area boundaries.

The Black Mountain area has several miles of hiking and equestrian trails, and is considered a destination for day hikers, backpackers, and horseback riders. The Mountains to Sea National Recreation Trail also

passes through the area. The northern portion of the area includes abandoned mine shafts and the popular Ray Mine rock hounding area, as well as a municipal water intake on Bowlen's Creek. The area also has extensive use by special use permittees, often in large groups.

Evaluation of Wilderness Characteristics

Apparent Naturalness

The area has a history of railroad logging in the early 1900's, followed by wildfires, non-native insect infestations and acid deposition; all of which have altered the extent, structure, and composition of its spruce-fir and hardwood forests. Remnants of railroad grades are still visible on both sides of the mountain, and one is now used as the Buncombe Range Horse Trail and Mountains to Sea Trail. The area has 12.4 miles of NFS trails managed for hiking and 7.5 miles of equestrian trail, all of which are minimally developed, with native surface tread and few structures. There was a helicopter landing zone in the north near Bowlen's Pyramid, but it has been allowed to grow up in recent years, as has its primitive access trail. These past impacts and features have blended or recovered to the point where they are no longer substantially noticeable to the average viewer.

In the northwest part of the area, Bowlen's Creek serves as a secondary water supply for the Town of Burnsville. Although the access road (NFSR 5578) terminates outside the evaluation area, there is a primitive roadbed extending approximately one mile into the area which is occasionally used by the Burnsville Water Department for access to a diversion dam and water intake structure. Under the roadbed is a 6" water main extending to State Road 1109. The northern and western sides of the area have a history of mineral and mica mining, with at least eight documented mine locations. There are approximately four miles of old roadbed and tramway which were used for mining exploration in south fork of Cattail Creek, and several mine shafts and associated roads in the Ray Mine area. None of these roadbeds are NFS roads, but some of them have been regraded recently so that steel grates could be installed over mine shaft entrances for protection of bats and public safety. Ray Mine is a local and regional attraction for rock hounding in the mine spoil piles. Many of these features have a constructed and unnatural appearance.

The higher elevation and cooler climate of the Black Mountain area tends to reduce occurrences of common nonnative invasive plants. The most notable invasive species affecting natural conditions in the Black Mountain area is the balsam woolly adelgid. The adelgid, along with increased stress from acid deposition, has killed many of the Fraser fir trees in this area. In places, the forest appears gray from standing dead Fraser fir in the overstory, and fallen trees on the forest floor. However, there continues to be regeneration of Fraser fir in the understory and the overstory is dominated by unaffected red spruce. Even with impacts to Fraser fir, these forests maintain an overall natural appearance.

Opportunities for Solitude or Primitive & Unconfined Recreation

With its remote and rugged character, and over 9,000 acres of core semi-primitive non-motorized area, the Black Mountains area offers many opportunities for solitude, as well as primitive and unconfined recreation. Sights and sounds of civilization or high potential for user encounters have some impact on opportunities for solitude in northern portions of the area and near Mt. Mitchell State Park, particularly during high use seasons, but they are not pervasive across the entire area. Opportunities for unconfined recreation are also impacted to some degree because of the area's relatively narrow shape and topography. The core area is traversed by a ridge running its entire length, while area boundaries are generally on steep side-slopes. This topography acts to limit recreation use on the side-slopes and focus users to the ridgetop along the Crest Trail; it also allows for views of surrounding development in the adjacent valleys.

From the “Crest” looking east, there are residential developments, agricultural lands, a golf course resort, and an airstrip visible in the South Toe River Valley. Private lands to the west are generally forested, with some agricultural, residential, and commercial development visible in the Cane River Valley. There is also a gravel quarry to the northwest, and although it is not visible from the area, sounds from blasting are occasionally heard. Segments of the Blue Ridge Parkway are visible to the south and southeast from certain locations along the ridge however, these impacts are not pervasive across the entire area. At the southwestern boundary, in the highly visited Mount Mitchell State Park, there are paved roads, parking lots, an observation platform, communication towers, and buildings visible. Outfitter and guide services also operate in the area, sometimes with large groups, and recreation events with hundreds of participants have been permitted in the past.

Primitive types of recreation are the primary recreation uses in the Black Mountains area, including day-hiking, backpacking, horseback riding, wildlife viewing, hunting, and fishing. The Black Mountain Crest Trail is very popular with backpackers seeking a remote and challenging experience. The Crest Trail spans the entire length of the Black Mountains area from Mount Mitchell State Park in the south to Bowlen’s Creek in the north, with nine of its 11 miles within the area. There are other challenging hiking trails in the area and the Buncombe Range Horse Trail, part of which is also designated the Mountains-to-Sea National Recreation Trail. There are no highly developed trails, mountain bike trails, or motorized trails in the area.

Other Values - Unique or Outstanding Qualities

The Black Mountain area boasts some of the highest peaks in the east and is one of the most scenic places on the Pisgah NF. Its high-elevation ridge and spruce-fir forests are unique in the southern Appalachian Mountains. The spruce-fir ecozone is rare within the region and only survives in the cooler climates of higher elevations such as the Black Mountains. The Black Mountains area is one of the last strongholds for several rare species, including the federally endangered rock gnome lichen, spruce-fir moss spider, and Carolina northern flying squirrel, as well as two animal species of conservation concern.

Middle Creek Research Natural Area is within the Black Mountains area. This Research Natural Area serves as an outdoor laboratory to study natural systems. Designation as a Research Natural Area does not preclude consideration or recommendation for inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System; this management is consistent with the educational and scientific values of wilderness. Within the Research Natural Area, Middle Creek Falls is indicative of the area’s diversity, supporting four rare plant species. There are also two State Natural Heritage Areas in the Black Mountains area.

Size & Manageability

The Black Mountain area is roughly 2.5 miles wide at its widest point, and approximately nine miles long. The area is primarily a ridge-top with boundaries at mid-slope on each side, and there are several narrow fingers of ownership on the northeastern side. A non-NFS road extends approximately one mile into the area to the northwest, providing access to a municipal water intake at Bowlen’s Creek. The northern most extension of the area contains the Ray Mines and associated non-NFS access roads. With minor boundary adjustments to exclude these features, the area could be managed to preserve wilderness characteristics.

Summary

With most of the Black Mountains area in an Inventoried Roadless Area, botanical special interest area, and Research Natural Area, these designations have allowed it to retain many wilderness characteristics. It has opportunities for solitude across much of the area, although private development in the South Toe River valley can be seen from some locations, the sound of blasting can occasionally be heard from a

nearby quarry, and parts of the area receive high visitation in peak use seasons. The area has opportunities for primitive and unconfined recreation in many locations, but the area's relatively narrow boundary configuration, steep side-slopes, and central ridge do tend to limit recreation use to the ridgeline. The area has outstanding and unique values, such as being part of the highest mountain range in the eastern United States, having one of the best examples of a high elevation spruce-fir forest in the Southern Appalachian Mountains, and being a destination for viewing exceptional scenery. Also, within the Research Natural Area, scientific studies are conducted in this rare ecosystem to determine long-term species composition and abundance changes from environmental stressors. Manageability of the area could be improved with boundary adjustments to exclude Ray Mine and Bowlen's Creek municipal water intake.

Quantitative Summary of Items/Activities within the Black Mountain Area

Disclaimer: Information was generated from FS spatial datasets. All figures are approximate.

Description of Area	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Spruce-Fir Ecozone:	acres	2,952.0
Northern Hardwood Ecozone:	acres	2,021.5
High Elevation Red Oak Ecozone:	acres	353.4
Acidic Cove Ecozone:	acres	1,321.8
Rich Cove Ecozone:	acres	1,978.5
Mesic Oak Ecozone:	acres	3,445.1
Dry-Mesic Oak Ecozone:	acres	0
Dry Oak Ecozone:	acres	23.6
Pine-Oak/Heath Ecozone:	acres	331.8
Shortleaf Pine Ecozone:	acres	0
Alluvial Forest Ecozone:	acres	0

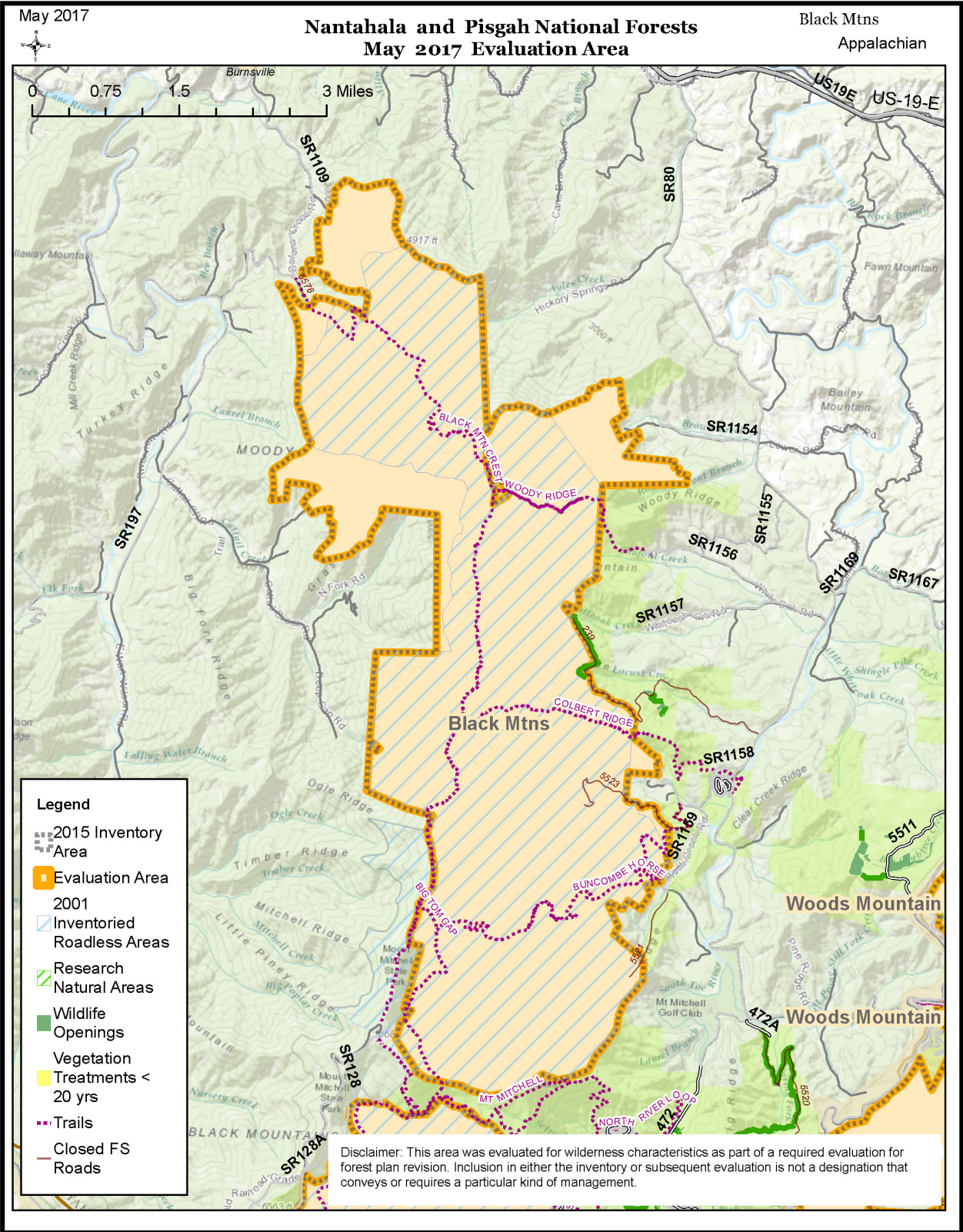
Apparent Naturalness	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Maintenance Level 1 National Forest System Roads:	miles	1.8
Closed Maintenance Level 2 National Forest System Roads:	miles	0.4
Road Stream Crossings, Bridge:	number	1
Road Stream Crossings, Other:	number	2
Trail Stream Crossings, Bridge:	number	0
Vegetation Management, 0-20 years old:	acres	0
Vegetation Management, 21-40 years old:	acres	112.9
Maintained Wildlife Fields (may overlap Bald Management Area):	acres	0.5
Existing Wilderness Study Area (WSA):	acres	0
Existing Inventoried Roadless Area (IRA may overlap WSA):	acres	10,568.8

Solitude or Primitive & Unconfined Recreation	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Current Backcountry Management Area (may overlap WSA & IRA):	acres	968.9
Inventoried Primitive Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) Setting:	acres	0
Inventoried Semi-Primitive Non-Motorized ROS Setting:	acres	9,334.1

Solitude or Primitive & Unconfined Recreation	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Inventoried Semi-Primitive Motorized ROS Setting (buffer of adjacent roads):	acres	1,550.1
Inventoried Roded Natural ROS Setting (buffer of adjacent roads):	acres	1,587.0
National Forest System Trail, Hike-only Allowed Use:	miles	12.4
National Forest System Trail, Hike-Bike Allowed Use:	miles	0
National Forest System Trail, Hike-Horse Allowed Use:	miles	7.5
National Forest System Trail, Hike-Bike-Horse Allowed Use:	miles	0

Unique & Outstanding Features	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Current Special Interest Management Area (scenic, geologic, botanical, zoological):	acres	2,468.5
Current Designated Wild & Scenic River Corridor (1/4 mile each side):	acres	0
Current Eligible Wild & Scenic River Corridor (1/4 mile each side):	acres	0
Research Natural Area:	acres	1,432.1

Size & Manageability	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Area, Total:	acres	12,472.6
Private/Non-Federal Inholdings, Total:	acres	25.9
Private/Non-Federal Inholdings, Count:	number	2
Outstanding or Reserved Subsurface Mineral Rights:	acres	0
Current Bald Management Area:	acres	0
Forest Research Plots, Count:	number	1



Name: Craggy Mountains

Acres: 10,653 acres

Description of Area

Location & Access

The Craggy Mountains area is on the Appalachian Ranger District of the Pisgah NF, southeast of Barnardsville in Buncombe County, North Carolina. The area lies northwest of the Blue Ridge Parkway, west of Big Butt Knob, and east of National Forest System (NFS) Road 63 (Stony Fork Road). There are several equestrian, bicycle, and hiking trails in the area, including the North Carolina Mountains to Sea National Recreation Trail. These are accessed via trailheads along the Blue Ridge Parkway, NC197, and NFS Roads 63 and 74 near the Dillingham community. The area has many local names including Big Ivy, Corner Rock, Coleman Boundary, Douglas Falls, and Craggy.

Surroundings

To the south and southeast is the Blue Ridge Parkway; to the east is the Big Tom Wilson Preserve; to the north are NFS lands and private lands in the Big Ivy community; and to the west are private lands in the Dillingham and Stony Fork communities and NFS lands in the Snowball Mountain area. All adjacent private lands are either forested lands in conservation easement, rural residential lands, or lands in pastoral/agricultural uses.

Topography & Vegetation

The Craggy Mountains area has high ridges to the south and east, and slopes down to lower elevations to the west and north. The area is predominately steep and rugged with over 3,000 feet in elevation change. The highest elevations are on Big Butt Knob and Craggy Pinnacle at approximately 5,720 feet, and the lowest is 2,600 feet at Corner Rock Creek near Dillingham. The southern quarter is isolated from surrounding areas to some degree by high ridges on three sides. The area is known for its springs and seeps, rich soils, lush vegetation, and rich plant diversity. Dominant ecozones include rich cove, northern hardwood, and mesic oak.

Current Uses

Central and northern parts of the Craggy Mountains area are currently managed for timber and wildlife, hunting, fishing, and a range of dispersed recreation activities. The area includes about 25 acres of maintained wildlife fields, a network of low-maintenance level NFS roads, rock climbing areas, and hiking, mountain bike, and equestrian trails. The southern quarter of the area is managed to preserve wilderness character as the Craggy Mountain congressionally designated Wilderness Study Area, which is also an Inventoried Roadless Area. This portion has no roads or wildlife fields, and is managed for primitive recreation, such as hiking, backpacking, hunting, fishing, and nature viewing. The area also has extensive use by special use permittees, often in large groups.

Evaluation of Wilderness Characteristics

Apparent Naturalness

There are many miles of NFS roads and trails in the northern three-quarters of the area, as well as wildlife fields that detract from a natural appearance. However, near the Big Butt Trail on the eastern boundary, there is little evidence of human modification in the diverse high-elevation forests. The southern portion of the area in the Wilderness Study Area is largely natural appearing. There is an old

growth hemlock forest in the Wilderness Study Area near Douglas Falls, but much of the hemlock is dead as a result of the nonnative invasive hemlock woolly adelgid.

Opportunities for Solitude or Primitive & Unconfined Recreation

Opportunities for solitude exist within the area along the Big Butt Trail and in the Wilderness Study Area. Sights and sounds of civilization are evident in the south from the Blue Ridge Parkway, and from adjacent private lands to the northwest; however, these impacts are not pervasive across the entire area. Encounters with vehicles, hunters, rock climbers, mountain bikers and horseback riders are likely along most trails and NFS roads in the northern three-quarters of the area (outside the Wilderness Study Area).

There are opportunities for primitive and unconfined recreation throughout the area, especially along the eastern boundary along the Big Butt Trail and in the Wilderness Study Area. Heavy mountain bike use in the central portion of the area is not considered primitive recreation.

Other Values - Unique or Outstanding Qualities

The Craggy Mountains area offers scenic beauty and rich hardwood forests. Overlooks of this area from the Blue Ridge Parkway at Pinnacle Gap, Craggy Pinnacle, and Craggy Gardens are some of the most visited scenic vistas in the area. With 33 rare plant and animal species, the Big Ivy area is highly prized for its old-growth hardwood forests and rich plant diversity. Douglas Falls is within the Wilderness Study Area and is a popular destination point. The area includes Walker Cove Research Natural Area, as well as three other State Natural Heritage Areas.

Size & Manageability

The entire Craggy Mountains area is more than 10,000 acres of National Forest System lands and is surrounded by approximately 100,000 acres of contiguous protected lands comprised of the Blue Ridge Parkway, Big Tom Wilson Preserve, Mount Mitchell State Park, and the Asheville Watershed. The area just north of the Wilderness Study Area is interspersed with open NFS roads, mountain bike trails, and maintained wildlife openings. The configuration of these linear features divides the area into smaller areas (the open NFS Road 74 (which is cherry stemmed out of the area) almost bisects the area from north to south).

The southern portion of the Craggy Mountains area has been managed to preserve wilderness characteristics since its designation as a Wilderness Study Area in 1984, and was recommended for wilderness designation in the 1987 Nantahala and Pisgah National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan. Additionally, a small area just north of the Wilderness Study Area called Locust Ridge also retains a natural appearance, as well as opportunities for solitude and primitive recreation. That area lies between the Wilderness Study Area boundary at Bullhead Ridge and Staire Branch, excluding NFSR 5555 and linear wildlife fields at Laurel Gap. Together the Wilderness Study Area and Locust Ridge area are less than 5,000 acres, but could be managed to preserve wilderness characteristics because of topography, boundary configuration, and isolated nature.

Summary

Northern and central portions of the Craggy Mountains area contain features that detract from wilderness characteristics of naturalness, solitude, and primitive recreation, including open roads and maintained wildlife fields. An open road, wildlife fields, and mountain bike trails divide the area into small areas of insufficient size to manage for wilderness characteristics; however, the Wilderness Study Area as designated by Congress retains a degree of wilderness characteristics; as does the Locust Ridge area immediately north of the Wilderness Study Area. The area east of NFSR 74 is contiguous with the

Blue Ridge Parkway, the Big Tom Wilson Preserve, Mount Mitchell State Park, and the Asheville Watershed, all of which are protected areas.

Quantitative Summary of Items/Activities within the Craggy Mountains Area

Disclaimer: Information was generated from FS spatial datasets. All figures are approximate.

Description of Area	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Spruce-Fir Ecozone:	acres	96.5
Northern Hardwood Ecozone:	acres	3,410.9
High Elevation Red Oak Ecozone:	acres	387.9
Acidic Cove Ecozone:	acres	345.0
Rich Cove Ecozone:	acres	4,135.7
Mesic Oak Ecozone:	acres	2,138.4
Dry-Mesic Oak Ecozone:	acres	0
Dry Oak Ecozone:	acres	0
Pine-Oak/Heath Ecozone:	acres	92.1
Shortleaf Pine Ecozone:	acres	0
Alluvial Forest Ecozone:	acres	0.0

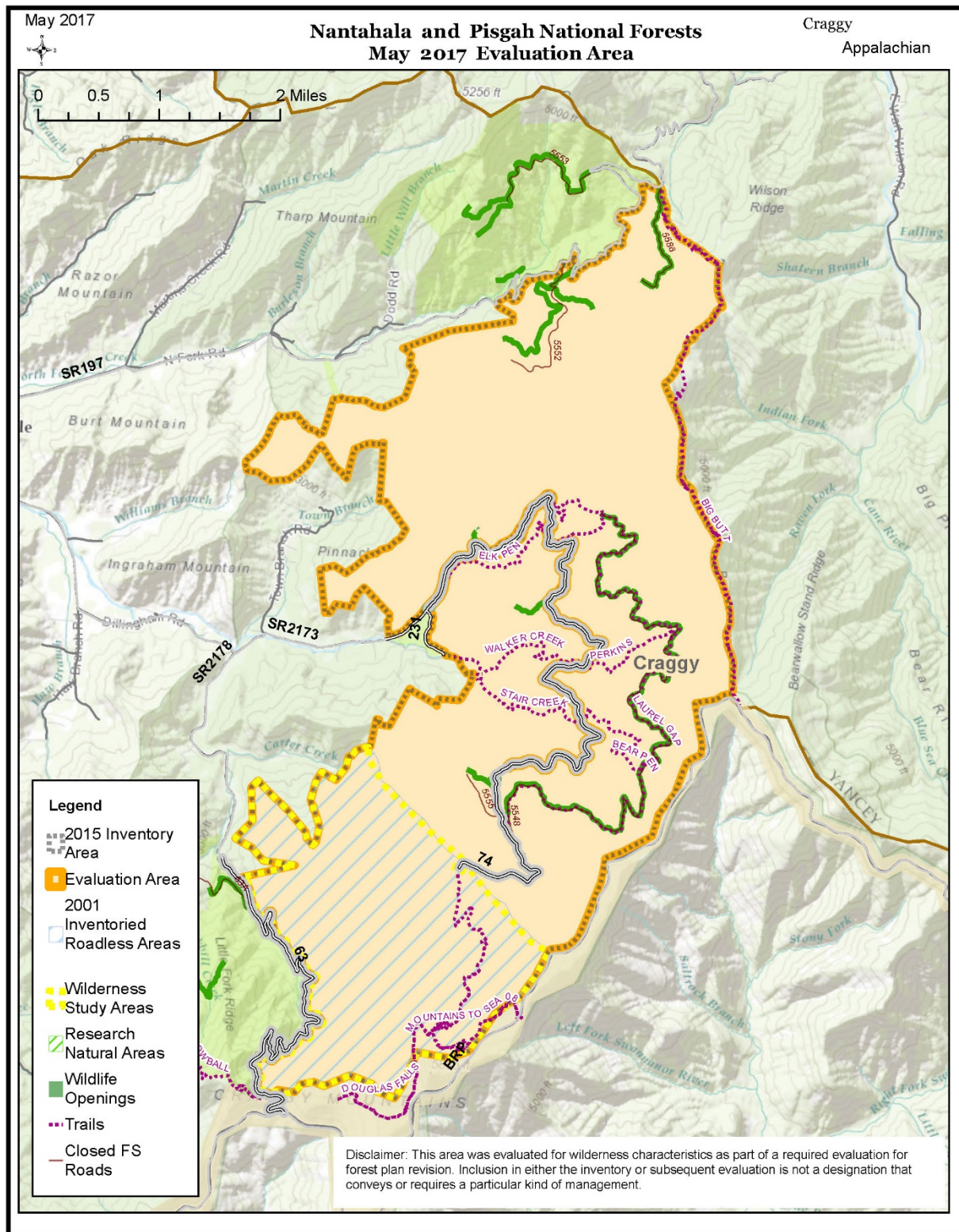
Apparent Naturalness	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Maintenance Level 1 National Forest System Roads:	miles	1.1
Closed Maintenance Level 2 National Forest System Roads:	miles	8.8
Road Stream Crossings, Bridge:	number	0
Road Stream Crossings, Other:	number	8
Trail Stream Crossings, Bridge:	number	0
Vegetation Management, 0-20 years old:	acres	0
Vegetation Management, 21-40 years old:	acres	250.0
Maintained Wildlife Fields (may overlap Bald Management Area):	acres	25.2
Existing Wilderness Study Area (WSA):	acres	2,572.8
Existing Inventoried Roadless Area (IRA may overlap WSA):	acres	2,624.3

Solitude or Primitive & Unconfined Recreation	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Current Backcountry Management Area (may overlap WSA & IRA):	acres	0
Inventoried Primitive Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) Setting:	acres	0
Inventoried Semi-Primitive Non-Motorized ROS Setting:	acres	2,394.7

	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Solitude or Primitive & Unconfined Recreation		
Inventoried Semi-Primitive Motorized ROS Setting (buffer of adjacent roads):	acres	1,369.8
Inventoried Roded Natural ROS Setting (buffer of adjacent roads):	acres	6,887.3
National Forest System Trail, Hike-only Allowed Use:	miles	10.6
National Forest System Trail, Hike-Bike Allowed Use:	miles	0
National Forest System Trail, Hike-Horse Allowed Use:	miles	1.4
National Forest System Trail, Hike-Bike-Horse Allowed Use:	miles	13.9

	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Unique & Outstanding Features		
Current Special Interest Management Area (scenic, geologic, botanical, zoological):	acres	0
Current Designated Wild & Scenic River Corridor (1/4 mile each side):	acres	0
Current Eligible Wild & Scenic River Corridor (1/4 mile each side):	acres	0
Research Natural Area:	acres	22.6

	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Size & Manageability		
Area, Total:	acres	10,652.8
Private/Non-Federal Inholdings, Total:	acres	0
Private/Non-Federal Inholdings, Count:	number	0
Outstanding or Reserved Subsurface Mineral Rights:	acres	0
Current Bald Management Area:	acres	0
Forest Research Plots, Count:	number	7



Name: Deerpark Mountain

(Note that this area was renamed from Bluff Mountain to reduce confusion, because Bluff Mountain itself is outside the area.)

Acres: 3,314 acres

Description of Area

Location & Access

The Deerpark Mountain area is located in Madison County, near the town of Hot Springs, NC, on the Appalachian Ranger District. The area is bounded by US-25/70 to the north (which crosses through Hot Springs), SR-1183 to the west, SR-1173 to the south, and NC-209 to the east. Access to the area is from the Shut-In Creek Trail off of SR-1173, the Appalachian Trail, which transects the area north to south, along SR-1173 to the south and Hot Springs to the north, as well as Van Cliff Loop Trail, along NC-209.

Surroundings

The Deerpark Mountain area boundaries are highly irregular with several protrusions along the southern, eastern, and northern borders that are mostly surrounded by private property. The northern boundary of the area is located adjacent to the town of Hot Springs. The western boundary of the area and a small section of the eastern boundary are adjacent to National Forest System lands. Rocky Bluff Campground, located off NC-209, is immediately adjacent to the area. The south western boundary is defined by a cleared utility corridor.

Topography & Vegetation

Elevation of the Deerpark Mountain area ranges from around 1,650 feet at Little Bottom Branch to 3,204 at Lamb Knob. The area is relatively shielded from the sight of development and roads, except near the boundaries, and from the northern portion of the area which is adjacent to Hot Springs. Secluded coves exist in the area that provide rich plant and wildlife habitat with a multitude of wildflowers. A wide-range of ecozones are represented across the area, including acidic cove, rich cove, mesic oak, dry-mesic oak, dry oak, pine-oak/heath, shortleaf pine, and alluvial forest. Approximately 200 acres of the area are dominated by white pine.

Current Uses

The Deerpark Mountain area has dispersed recreation opportunities and evidence of recent forest vegetation management activities. The Appalachian Trail transects north-south in the area with campsite structures and experiences seasonal heavy use during the spring, summer, and fall. There are two other trails in the southern portion of the area that are designated as hike-only. The area has several maintained wildlife fields totaling 3.2 acres, and two vegetation management units that occurred 21-40 years ago totaling 49.7 acres. Collection of non-timber forest products such as medicinal herbs and ginseng occurs in the area.

Evaluation of Wilderness Characteristics

Apparent Naturalness

The Deerpark Mountain area has been logged in the past, including almost 50 acres less than 40 years ago. Some of these areas have recovered and are natural appearing on the landscape. There are two

wildlife openings in the southern portion of the area that are regularly maintained and detract from naturalness in their immediate vicinity.

Opportunities for Solitude or Primitive & Unconfined Recreation

While opportunities for solitude exist across much of the area, six miles of the Appalachian Trail occur in the area and are heavily used in the spring, summer, and fall, which can detract from the area's opportunities for solitude. Although parts of the area are secluded and without built structures and trails, the Deepark Mountain area is small in size and close to a number of roads and the town of Hot Springs, where the sights and sounds of people and vehicles may detract from solitude along the periphery of the area.

Other Values - Unique or Outstanding Qualities

Among the area's herbaceous understory is Climbing Fumitory, a rare plant species. Montane Mafic Cliff habitat is also found in the area. The northern corner of the area is partially within the corridor of the French Broad River, an eligible Wild and Scenic River.

Size & Manageability

At 3,335 acres, the Deepark Mountain area is not of sufficient size to practically manage its preservation and use in an unimpaired condition. Area boundaries are not well consolidated, and have several protrusions on the southern, eastern, and northern boundaries. The area is also directly adjacent to private land ownership, including the town of Hot Springs to the north. There is one 21-acre non-federal inholding located on the southern border of the area that is accessed by a private road (PR209). Seventy acres of outstanding subsurface mineral rights exist in the southeast portion of the area. Because of the area's small size, sights and sounds of civilization may be evident in the distance from the highest peaks within the area, especially near the southern, eastern, and northern boundaries.

Summary

The Deepark area is not of sufficient size and configuration to manage its preservation and use in an unimpaired condition. Wildlife openings and heavily used hiking trails detract from the naturalness and the solitude of the area. The opportunity for solitude and unconfined recreation is degraded due to the proximity to adjacent private lands and US highway 25/70.

Quantitative Summary of Items/Activities within the Deepark Mountain Area

Disclaimer: Information was generated from FS spatial datasets. All figures are approximate.

Description of Area	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Spruce-Fir Ecozone:	acres	0
Northern Hardwood Ecozone:	acres	0
High Elevation Red Oak Ecozone:	acres	0
Acidic Cove Ecozone:	acres	727.9
Rich Cove Ecozone:	acres	54.8
Mesic Oak Ecozone:	acres	581.8
Dry-Mesic Oak Ecozone:	acres	453.4
Dry Oak Ecozone:	acres	687.6
Pine-Oak/Heath Ecozone:	acres	466.9
Shortleaf Pine Ecozone:	acres	321.9
Alluvial Forest Ecozone:	acres	2.7

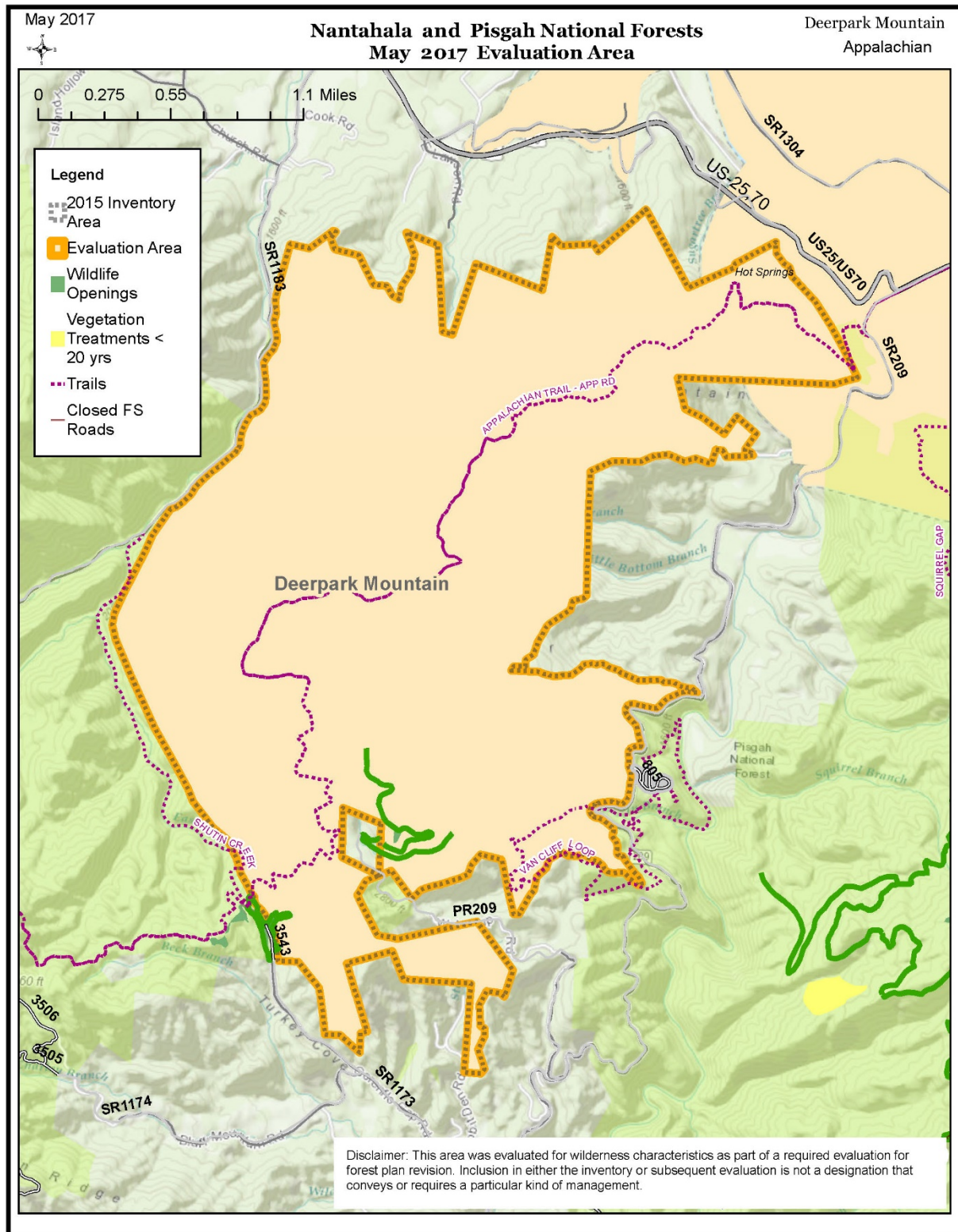
Apparent Naturalness	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Maintenance Level 1 National Forest System Roads:	miles	0
Closed Maintenance Level 2 National Forest System Roads:	miles	0
Road Stream Crossings, Bridge:	number	0
Road Stream Crossings, Other:	number	0
Trail Stream Crossings, Bridge:	number	1
Vegetation Management, 0-20 years old:	acres	0
Vegetation Management, 21-40 years old:	acres	49.7
Maintained Wildlife Fields (may overlap Bald Management Area):	acres	3.2
Existing Wilderness Study Area (WSA):	acres	0
Existing Inventoried Roadless Area (IRA may overlap WSA):	acres	0

Solitude or Primitive & Unconfined Recreation	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Current Backcountry Management Area (may overlap WSA & IRA):	acres	0
Inventoried Primitive Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) Setting:	acres	0
Inventoried Semi-Primitive Non-Motorized ROS Setting:	acres	1,463.4

	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Solitude or Primitive & Unconfined Recreation		
Inventoried Semi-Primitive Motorized ROS Setting (buffer of adjacent roads):	acres	0
Inventoried Roded Natural ROS Setting (buffer of adjacent roads):	acres	1,850.4
National Forest System Trail, Hike-only Allowed Use:	miles	13.1
National Forest System Trail, Hike-Bike Allowed Use:	miles	0
National Forest System Trail, Hike-Horse Allowed Use:	miles	0
National Forest System Trail, Hike-Bike-Horse Allowed Use:	miles	0

	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Unique & Outstanding Features		
Current Special Interest Management Area (scenic, geologic, botanical, zoological):	acres	0
Current Designated Wild & Scenic River Corridor (1/4 mile each side):	acres	0
Current Eligible Wild & Scenic River Corridor (1/4 mile each side):	acres	9.4
Research Natural Area:	acres	0

	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Size & Manageability		
Area, Total:	acres	3,313.7
Private/Non-Federal Inholdings, Total:	acres	21.35
Private/Non-Federal Inholdings, Count:	number	1
Outstanding or Reserved Subsurface Mineral Rights:	acres	70.2
Current Bald Management Area:	acres	0



Name: Highlands of Roan

Acres: 5,217 acres

(Note that this area was renamed from Highlands of Roan #2 to reduce confusion, because there was not a separate area identified in the inventory as Highlands of Roan #1.)

Description of Area

Location & Access

The Highlands of Roan area, located in Avery and Mitchell Counties, is on the Appalachian Ranger District of the Pisgah NF. It is about 12 air-miles north of Spruce Pine, North Carolina on North Carolina Highway 261 (NC261). This very popular area is primarily open grassy balds extending from NC261 at Carvers Gap on the west to Doll Flats on the east. The parking area at Carver's Gap is open year-round.

The area is accessible via NC261 (TN143) on the west side, as well as the National Forest System Road 5545 (NFSR5545), coinciding with the Overmountain Victory Trail (NFST308T). This road leads to the Overmountain shelter. Several roads originating at US19E on the eastern side may also be used to access the area.

Surroundings

This area is south of the Cherokee NF in Tennessee. Hampton Creek State Natural Area and Roan Mountain State Park lie to the north in Tennessee. The popular Roan Mountain Recreation Area is immediately west of the area. This area includes a half-mile of paved trail through rhododendron gardens and a trail to the Roan High Bluff Overlook. The Recreation Area, which also provides parking, restrooms, and picnic facilities, is open to vehicular access from April to November.

The adjacent private land is comprised primarily of farmland and rural residential development. The city of Elizabethton, Tennessee, as well as the adjacent developed recreation area, farmland, and rural residential development, can be seen from the balds and ridgeline.

Topography & Vegetation

The area is located in what is locally-known as the "North Carolina high country", where elevations range from about 3,700 feet at Little Horse Creek on the southeastern side to 6,165 feet at Grassy Ridge Bald in the middle of the area, near the Appalachian Trail. The area supports headwater streams of the North Toe River.

Well known for its rhododendron displays in late spring and early summer, the Roan Mountain area contains a rich diversity of vegetation from extensive heath and grassy balds to spruce-fir forest. It also contains northern hardwood forest downslope from the spruce-fir forests and balds. Other ecozones in the area include mesic oak and rich cove forests.

Many rare species are found in the Roan Mountain Highlands, including federally listed species such as Carolina northern flying squirrel, northern long-eared bat, spruce-fir moss spider, spreading avens, Blue Ridge goldenrod, and Roan bluet. Other rare plant species found in the area include Gray's lily, bent avens, and Schweinitz's ragwort.

Current Uses

The area is managed primarily to maintain the grassy balds and protect plant diversity and wildlife. Recreation in the area includes hiking, backpacking, camping, and nature viewing. Forest product

collection (e.g., Fraser fir seedlings and cones) occurs in the area. The area also has extensive use by special use permittees, often in large groups.

The Appalachian National Scenic Trail crosses the grassy summits and provides panoramic mountain views from the ridgetop along the northern boundary of the area. Running along the state border, the Appalachian Trail forms the northern border to the point where the trail crosses over into North Carolina.

Evaluation of Wilderness Characteristics

Apparent Naturalness

The area contains extensive grassy balds that are maintained through mechanical mowing. Portions of the Appalachian Trail in the area have been armored with geotextile and imported rock to maintain the integrity of the trail and prevent erosion which otherwise would occur due to the high volume of visitors.

Nonnative invasive species are present in the area and eradication efforts are frequent.

Overmountain Shelter is an old barn that provides lodging to backpackers within the Highlands of Roan area. The shelter has been a high-maintenance location that also requires trash removal (by vehicle). It is the only shelter in the Tennessee Eastman Hiking & Canoeing Club that has a privy.

The area contains 1.4 miles of closed maintenance level 2 National Forest System (NFS) road. There are over 450 acres of wildlife fields and balds in the area that are maintained by mechanical mowing.

Opportunities for Solitude or Primitive & Unconfined Recreation

Heavy visitation to the Roan Mountain Recreation Area and this section of the Appalachian Trail precludes solitude for most of the year. The area contains two foot-traffic only trails totaling 17.8 miles in length: the Appalachian National Scenic Trail and the Overmountain Victory Trail. In June, thousands of people visit Roan Mountain to walk among the rhododendron gardens.

Opportunities for solitude or primitive and unconfined recreation, occur primarily in winter months; however, the section of the Appalachian Trail located here is one of the most heavily used in the region. The popularity of this area diminishes opportunities for solitude. In addition, expansive views toward adjacent development adversely impact solitude with sights of civilization.

Other Values - Unique or Outstanding Qualities

The area provides outstanding scenic values with panoramic views in all directions. Unique features include the high elevation rocky summit, health balds, grassy balds, beech gap, and boulder-fields. Along with the rhododendron gardens, rare plants are found in the area including spreading avens, Blue Ridge goldenrod, and Roan bluet. Many small mammals and raptors frequent the area, with the Appalachian cottontail, Carolina northern flying squirrel, and Southern Appalachian Saw-whet Owl near the southern extent of their ranges. Birds of the area include some rare and local nesting species such as Hermit Thrush and Alder Flycatcher.

Size & Manageability

Of the 5,217 acre evaluation area, about 27% (1,424 acres) has outstanding or reserved subsurface mineral rights.

The area is irregularly shaped and generally elongated in a southwest to northeast direction, with many small protrusions, particularly along the eastern, southern and western boundaries. Some sections are as narrow as a tenth of a mile, while others exceed two miles in width. The northern and northwestern

boundary is coincident with the North Carolina/Tennessee state line. This boundary is adjacent to the Cherokee NF, except for approximately one mile of private land between Big Ridge and Doll Branch near Shell Creek Road. The remainder of the area borders private land in North Carolina to the west, south, and east, with the exception of about a half mile on the west side along NC261, where the area borders national forest land and the Roan Mountain Recreation Area.

Most public use is along the ridgeline. Maintenance is required at intervals on the gravel USFS access road to Overmountain Shelter. Maintenance of the balds requires mechanical mowing.

Summary

There are unique bald ecosystems and associated wildlife and plants in the area that depend on routine maintenance, which detracts from naturalness. The heavy public use of the area has a significant impact on solitude. Developments present in the area and the irregular configuration negatively impact the manageability for wilderness.

Quantitative Summary of Items/Activities within the Highlands of Roan Area

Disclaimer: Information was generated from FS spatial datasets. All figures are approximate.

Description of Area	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Spruce-Fir Ecozone:	acres	613.6
Northern Hardwood Ecozone:	acres	3,972.7
High Elevation Red Oak Ecozone:	acres	41.4
Acidic Cove Ecozone:	acres	29.3
Rich Cove Ecozone:	acres	81.5
Mesic Oak Ecozone:	acres	192.7
Dry-Mesic Oak Ecozone:	acres	0
Dry Oak Ecozone:	acres	1.9
Pine-Oak/Heath Ecozone:	acres	2.1
Shortleaf Pine Ecozone:	acres	0
Alluvial Forest Ecozone:	acres	0

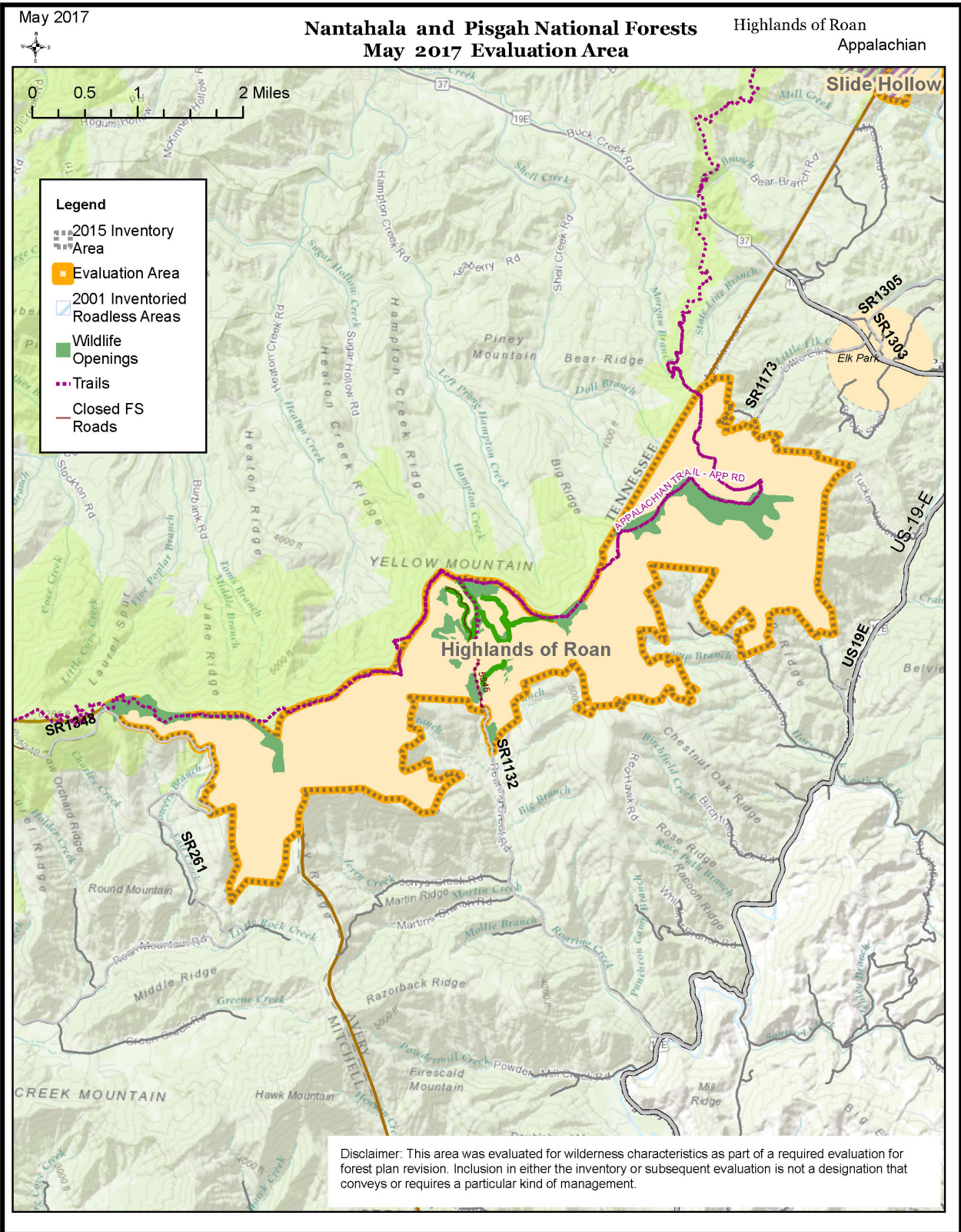
Apparent Naturalness	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Maintenance Level 1 National Forest System Roads:	miles	0
Closed Maintenance Level 2 National Forest System Roads:	miles	1.4
Road Stream Crossings, Bridge:	number	0
Road Stream Crossings, Other:	number	4
Trail Stream Crossings, Bridge:	number	0
Vegetation Management, 0-20 years old:	acres	0
Vegetation Management, 21-40 years old:	acres	0
Maintained Wildlife Fields (may overlap Bald Management Area):	acres	449.9
Existing Wilderness Study Area (WSA):	acres	0
Existing Inventoried Roadless Area (IRA may overlap WSA):	acres	0

Solitude or Primitive & Unconfined Recreation	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Current Backcountry Management Area (may overlap WSA & IRA):	acres	0
Inventoried Primitive Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) Setting:	acres	0
Inventoried Semi-Primitive Non-Motorized ROS Setting:	acres	3,222.3

	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Solitude or Primitive & Unconfined Recreation		
Inventoried Semi-Primitive Motorized ROS Setting (buffer of adjacent roads):	acres	78.5
Inventoried Roded Natural ROS Setting (buffer of adjacent roads):	acres	1,882.1
National Forest System Trail, Hike-only Allowed Use:	miles	17.8
National Forest System Trail, Hike-Bike Allowed Use:	miles	0
National Forest System Trail, Hike-Horse Allowed Use:	miles	0
National Forest System Trail, Hike-Bike-Horse Allowed Use:	miles	0

	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Unique & Outstanding Features		
Current Special Interest Management Area (scenic, geologic, botanical, zoological):	acres	0
Current Designated Wild & Scenic River Corridor (1/4 mile each side):	acres	0
Current Eligible Wild & Scenic River Corridor (1/4 mile each side):	acres	0
Research Natural Area:	acres	0

	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Size & Manageability		
Area, Total:	acres	5,216.8
Private/Non-Federal Inholdings, Total:	acres	0
Private/Non-Federal Inholdings, Count:	number	0
Outstanding or Reserved Subsurface Mineral Rights:	acres	1,423.7
Current Bald Management Area:	acres	1,957.6
Forest Research Plots, Count:	number	0



Name: Nolichucky Gorge

Acres: 2,465 acres

Description of Area

Location & Access

The Nolichucky Gorge area is located in Yancey County, NC, on the Appalachian Ranger District of the Pisgah NF. The area borders Mitchell County and the Cherokee NF (Tennessee) to the west. Flattop Road (NFSR278) is just south of the area, and the Nolichucky River borders the area on the north. Access to the area is from two trailheads along Flattop Road (NFSR278). The Appalachian Trail crosses through the area for a short distance in the south at Devils Green Gap. Devils Creek Road (NFSR5506), a maintenance level 2 road, enters the area from the south. An active railroad runs along the Nolichucky River and is adjacent to the area along much of the northern border.

Surroundings

The area borders the Cherokee NF (Tennessee) to the west. The northwest boundary is adjacent to the Nolichucky River, an eligible Wild and Scenic River. Approximately 190 acres of private land are adjacent to the northern boundary of the area, between other Forest Service ownership creating a private inholding. The remaining borders are adjacent to current Pisgah NF land. At its nearest point, Flattop Road (NFSR278) is 100 feet away from the area, and remains relatively near to the southern boundary of the area. US 19W is within one mile of the southern boundary. An active railroad runs along the Nolichucky River and is adjacent to the northwest boundary of the evaluation area.

Topography & Vegetation

The Nolichucky Gorge area, primarily a north facing slope, is defined by Flattop Mountain, a long ridge that represents the southern border of the area before it drops down to Devils Green Gap. Elevation at Flattop Mountain ridge is approximately 4,716 feet, and drops dramatically to approximately 1,800 feet at the Nolichucky River. Much of the area is between 4,000 to 4,200 feet in elevation. The sharp changes in elevation from the high ridge down to the river support a range of ecozones, including northern hardwood, high elevation red oak, acidic cove, rich cove, mesic oak, dry-mesic oak, dry oak, pine-oak/heath, shortleaf pine, and alluvial forest ecozones. The lower elevations are predominantly acidic cove, rich cove, and mesic oak forests while the mid and higher elevations are predominantly northern hardwood forests.

Current Uses

The Nolichucky Gorge area is managed to emphasize backcountry recreation, timber management, and managed habitat of mixed age forests for wildlife. Within the Nolichucky Gorge area there are 6.6 acres of maintained wildlife openings in the southwest portion of the area along a ridgeline, as well as 65 acres of vegetation management between 21-40 years old. Devils Creek Road (NFSR5506), a closed maintenance level 2 road, is used as Devils Creek Trail and is a maintained wildlife opening.

The area has two trails that are infrequently used, the Devils Creek Trail and the Lost Cove Trail. The Appalachian Trail runs through the area for about 450 feet in the southwest corner.

Evaluation of Wilderness Characteristics

Apparent Naturalness

The Nolichucky Gorge area has been logged in the past and there is a closed maintenance level 2 road, Devils Creek, which is an actively maintained wildlife opening and also a portion of the Devils Creek Trail. There are three vegetation management units between 21 and 40 years old in the area. This area is adjacent to Flattop Ridge, where there is a series of high elevation wildlife openings. Despite the logging history across much of this area, portions of the area contain forest with old growth characteristics.

Opportunities for Solitude or Primitive & Unconfined Recreation

Although a significant portion of the area is managed for backcountry recreation with opportunities for solitude; sights and sounds of civilization in the northern portion of the area are common from the railroad that runs along the Nolichucky River. Flattop Road (NFRS278) runs parallel to the southern border of the area, along the high ridge of Flattop Mountain. Due to the topography of the gorge, sights and sounds from sources other than the railroad might be blocked.

Other Values - Unique or Outstanding Qualities

Montane calcareous cliff, a unique habitat, is found within the area. Flattop Mountain is a long ridge with several openings that offer views of the gorge to the north. The Nolichucky River, which is an eligible Wild and Scenic River, is just north of the area and adjacent to the active railroad. The federally threatened Virginia spiraea occurs in this area as well as a designated old growth patch on the slopes of the north side of the gorge. There is one State Natural Heritage Area in the area.

Size & Manageability

The relatively small size of this area does not lend itself well to being managed for wilderness. Portions of the northern boundary are adjacent to an active railroad that runs along the Nolichucky River. There is a private inholding between the area and the Nolichucky River as well as private land along the northern edge of the area; otherwise the remainder of the boundary is adjacent to NFS lands.

Summary

The Nolichucky Gorge area is less than half of the size typically considered sufficient to manage for preservation and use in an unimpaired condition. Current uses, maintained wildlife openings, and infrastructure impact the natural characteristics of the area, while potential sights or sounds of civilization and inholdings detract from and opportunities for solitude and unconfined recreation, especially the active railroad that is adjacent to portions of the northern boundary.

Quantitative Summary of Items/Activities within the Nolichucky Gorge Area

Disclaimer: Information was generated from FS spatial datasets. All figures are approximate.

Description of Area	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Spruce-Fir Ecozone:	acres	0.9
Northern Hardwood Ecozone:	acres	297.6
High Elevation Red Oak Ecozone:	acres	7.7
Acidic Cove Ecozone:	acres	702.5
Rich Cove Ecozone:	acres	583.4
Mesic Oak Ecozone:	acres	494.4
Dry-Mesic Oak Ecozone:	acres	11.5
Dry Oak Ecozone:	acres	140.2
Pine-Oak/Heath Ecozone:	acres	220.3
Shortleaf Pine Ecozone:	acres	0.5
Alluvial Forest Ecozone:	acres	8.2

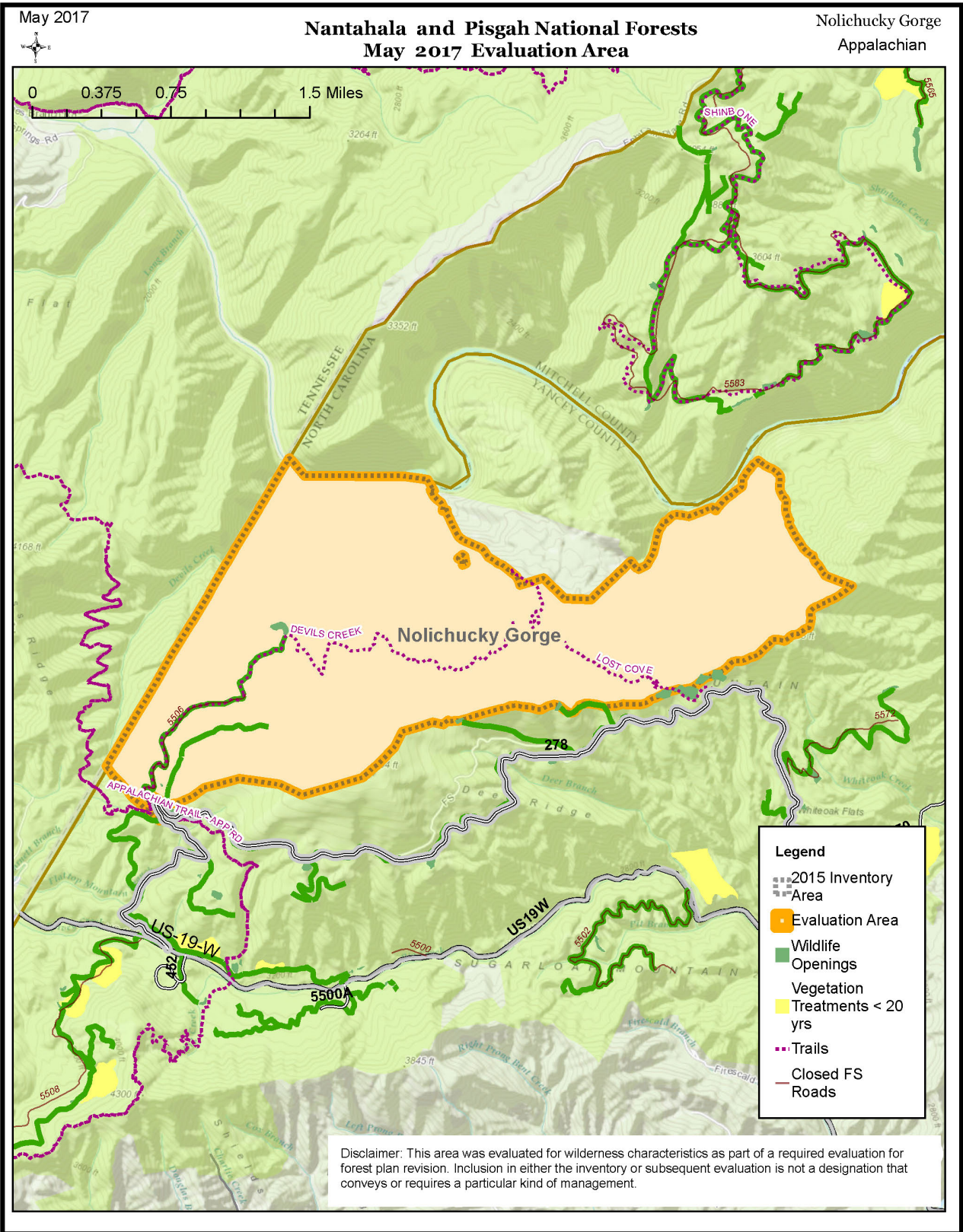
Apparent Naturalness	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Maintenance Level 1 National Forest System Roads:	miles	0
Closed Maintenance Level 2 National Forest System Roads:	miles	1.0
Road Stream Crossings, Bridge:	number	0
Road Stream Crossings, Other:	number	1
Trail Stream Crossings, Bridge:	number	0
Vegetation Management, 0-20 years old:	acres	0
Vegetation Management, 21-40 years old:	acres	64.8
Maintained Wildlife Fields (may overlap Bald Management Area):	acres	6.6
Existing Wilderness Study Area (WSA):	acres	0
Existing Inventoried Roadless Area (IRA may overlap WSA):	acres	0

Solitude or Primitive & Unconfined Recreation	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Current Backcountry Management Area (may overlap WSA & IRA):	acres	1,494.5
Inventoried Primitive Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) Setting:	acres	0
Inventoried Semi-Primitive Non-Motorized ROS Setting:	acres	683.1

	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Solitude or Primitive & Unconfined Recreation		
Inventoried Semi-Primitive Motorized ROS Setting (buffer of adjacent roads):	acres	916.3
Inventoried Roded Natural ROS Setting (buffer of adjacent roads):	acres	864.9
National Forest System Trail, Hike-only Allowed Use:	miles	5.1
National Forest System Trail, Hike-Bike Allowed Use:	miles	0.1
National Forest System Trail, Hike-Horse Allowed Use:	miles	0
National Forest System Trail, Hike-Bike-Horse Allowed Use:	miles	0

	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Unique & Outstanding Features		
Current Special Interest Management Area (scenic, geologic, botanical, zoological):	acres	0
Current Designated Wild & Scenic River Corridor (1/4 mile each side):	acres	0
Current Eligible Wild & Scenic River Corridor (1/4 mile each side):	acres	255.2
Research Natural Area:	acres	0

	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Size & Manageability		
Area, Total:	acres	2,464.6
Private/Non-Federal Inholdings, Total:	acres	0.75
Private/Non-Federal Inholdings, Count:	number	1
Outstanding or Reserved Subsurface Mineral Rights:	acres	1.3
Current Bald Management Area:	acres	0
Forest Research Plots, Count:	number	0



Name: Pigeon River

Acres: 5,999 acres

Description of Area

Location & Access

The Pigeon River area, located in Pigeon River Gorge in Haywood County, NC, is on the Appalachian Ranger District of the Pisgah NF. The Great Smoky Mountains National Park is to the west. The area is bounded by Interstate 40 (I-40) on the south, where it runs along the Pigeon River, and the North Carolina and Tennessee state line to the north. It is most easily accessed from Skiffley Creek Road (NFSR 3580).

Surroundings

The area lies between the Cherokee NF (Tennessee) to the north and the I-40 corridor to the south. The eastern boundary is adjacent to national forest lands and the popular Harmon Den recreation area which includes Harmon Den Horse Camp, equestrian and hiking trails, picnicking facilities, parking lots, and restrooms. Skiffley Creek Road (NFSR 3580), which is cherry-stemmed out of the area, provides access into the area. Also located in this area is a Forest Service road that leads to Max Patch, a very popular scenic mountain bald near the North Carolina and Tennessee border. A rural residential area lies to the east, in the vicinity of Max Patch Road.

Topography & Vegetation

The area contains steep and rugged terrain, especially near the high ridges of Snowbird Mountain to the north and west, and to the south where the area is adjacent to I-40. The center section consists of a valley area between Snowbird Mountain and Harmon Den Mountain. The eastern section contains roads, trails, and about five acres of maintained wildlife openings. This area is primarily formed by Harmon Den Mountain and streams that flow in a southwesterly direction to the Pigeon River which runs along I-40. Elevations range from 1,520 feet near where Snowbird Creek leaves the area at I-40 to 4,240 feet near the Radio Range Station (Federal Aviation Administration radio frequency transmitter) on the northern border.

The forest type is comprised primarily of mesic oak, rich cove, pine oak/heath, dry mesic oak, and acidic cove ecozones. There is a large patch of forest with old growth characteristics in the area.

Current Uses

About 2,679 acres is managed for backcountry recreation. It is a popular area for hiking, horseback riding, backpacking, scenery, nature-viewing, forest product gathering (e.g., ginseng) and hunting. There are also fishing opportunities in area streams.

The Groundhog Creek Shelter is a structure along the Appalachian National Scenic Trail (AT) where Groundhog Creek Trail (NFST315) intersects the AT. A portion of NFST315 follows along an old roadbed. NFST315 then continues south along Groundhog Creek where it meets Rube Rock Trail (NFST314). After crossing Rube Rock Branch, the trail turns back to the north; eventually reconnecting with the AT further to the west.

Evaluation of Wilderness Characteristics

Apparent Naturalness

Portions of the Pigeon River area have evidence of past farming and logging, and signs of recent forest management, particularly toward the east side where Cold Springs Creek flows through dense woods and grassy fields down to the Pigeon River along I-40. There are approximately five acres of maintained wildlife fields in the area. Infrastructure within the area includes the Groundhog Creek Shelter, two road-stream crossings, 0.5 miles of level 1 FS Road, and 2.2 miles of closed Level 2 FS Road. There is evidence of forest management and timber harvest on the east side of Harmon Den Mountain, including old skid trail systems and log landings. NFSR148A located east of the area, leads to a 2016 timber sale which is part of the Harmon Den project. Approximately 128 acres have been actively managed for timber in recent years.

Opportunities for Solitude or Primitive & Unconfined Recreation

The area contains two hike-only trails, totaling 17.4 miles. Horseback riding is permitted on NFSR3580, a portion of which is within the area boundaries.

Sights, sounds and vehicle emissions from the adjacent I-40 corridor have the potential to diminish opportunities for solitude in the southern portion of the area. This area is part of a main east coast aircraft flight path, and has a Federal Aviation Administration radio frequency transmitter on Snowbird Mountain on the northern boundary of the area. Area trails and roads receive heavy public use, which can detract from solitude.

Other Values - Unique or Outstanding Qualities

When hiking the Appalachian Trail through the Great Smoky Mountains National Park, this is the first area encountered as a hiker leaves the Park in a northerly direction. This area provides a wildlife corridor from the Great Smoky Mountains National Park to the neighboring national forest lands in North Carolina and Tennessee. A ridge over the interstate tunnels provide wildlife access to the area. Elk can be found here and native brook trout have been restored to Cherry Cove Creek. Waterfalls, large boulders, old forests on the lower slopes, and high scenic values are found within the area.

Size & Manageability

A large area surrounding NFSR 3580 has been excluded from the Pigeon River area on the east, as it is an open road, frequently used by equestrians. The border along this area is highly irregular and would be difficult to manage for wilderness. Portions of other Forest Service roads and trails are located in the excluded area. Approximately half of the Pigeon River area is currently managed for backcountry recreation. Over 99% (5,981 acres) of the area has outstanding or reserved subsurface mineral rights.

The southeast side of the area is bounded by Cold Springs Road and the adjacent Cold Springs Creek. On the northeast side of the area, the exclusion creates a long, narrow, irregular shape bounded by NFSR357 to the east.

Summary

Naturalness of the Pigeon River area is impacted by evidence from past farming and logging, signs of recent forest management, maintained wildlife fields and infrastructure including shelters, roads and stream crossings. The heavy use of the existing trails, the sights, sounds and vehicle emissions from the adjacent I-40 corridor, as well as the east coast airport flight path, diminish opportunities for solitude in the area. Size and configuration of the area detract from managing for wilderness characteristics.

Quantitative Summary of Items/Activities within the Pigeon River Area

Disclaimer: Information was generated from FS spatial datasets. All figures are approximate.

Description of Area	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Spruce-Fir Ecozone:	acres	0
Northern Hardwood Ecozone:	acres	0.7
High Elevation Red Oak Ecozone:	acres	0.6
Acidic Cove Ecozone:	acres	441.8
Rich Cove Ecozone:	acres	1,591.6
Mesic Oak Ecozone:	acres	1,861.5
Dry-Mesic Oak Ecozone:	acres	945.8
Dry Oak Ecozone:	acres	135.9
Pine-Oak/Heath Ecozone:	acres	977.7
Shortleaf Pine Ecozone:	acres	30.5
Alluvial Forest Ecozone:	acres	2.2

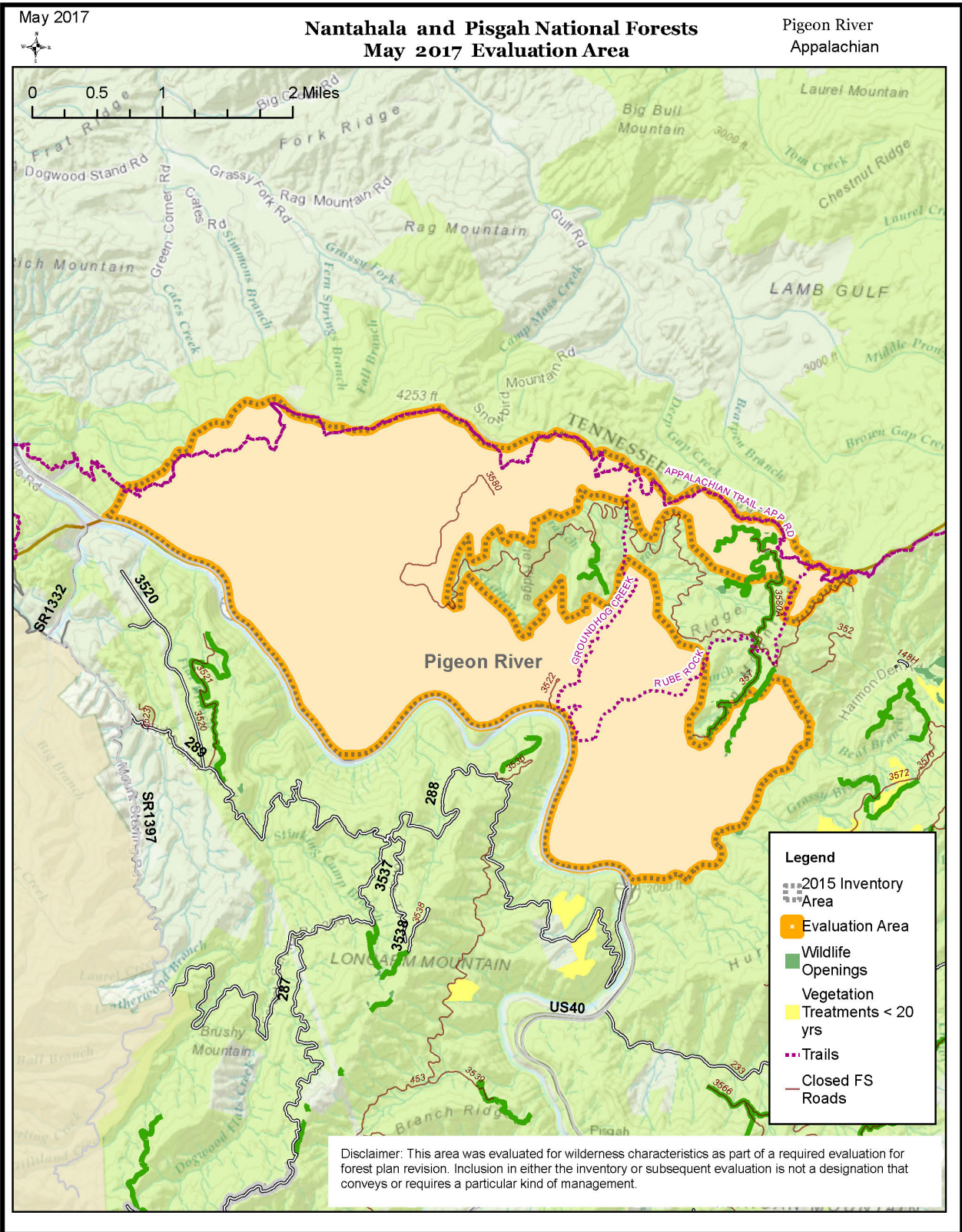
Apparent Naturalness	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Maintenance Level 1 National Forest System Roads:	miles	0.5
Closed Maintenance Level 2 National Forest System Roads:	miles	2.2
Road Stream Crossings, Bridge:	number	0
Road Stream Crossings, Other:	number	2
Trail Stream Crossings, Bridge:	number	0
Vegetation Management, 0-20 years old:	acres	0
Vegetation Management, 21-40 years old:	acres	127.6
Maintained Wildlife Fields (may overlap Bald Management Area):	acres	5.9
Existing Wilderness Study Area (WSA):	acres	0
Existing Inventoried Roadless Area (IRA may overlap WSA):	acres	0

Solitude or Primitive & Unconfined Recreation	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Current Backcountry Management Area (may overlap WSA & IRA):	acres	2,678.7
Inventoried Primitive Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) Setting:	acres	0
Inventoried Semi-Primitive Non-Motorized ROS Setting:	acres	770.6

	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Solitude or Primitive & Unconfined Recreation		
Inventoried Semi-Primitive Motorized ROS Setting (buffer of adjacent roads):	acres	992.5
Inventoried Roded Natural ROS Setting (buffer of adjacent roads):	acres	4,226.1
National Forest System Trail, Hike-only Allowed Use:	miles	17.4
National Forest System Trail, Hike-Bike Allowed Use:	miles	0
National Forest System Trail, Hike-Horse Allowed Use:	miles	0
National Forest System Trail, Hike-Bike-Horse Allowed Use:	miles	0

	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Unique & Outstanding Features		
Current Special Interest Management Area (scenic, geologic, botanical, zoological):	acres	0
Current Designated Wild & Scenic River Corridor (1/4 mile each side):	acres	0
Current Eligible Wild & Scenic River Corridor (1/4 mile each side):	acres	0
Research Natural Area:	acres	0

	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Size & Manageability		
Area, Total:	acres	5,999.0
Private/Non-Federal Inholdings, Total:	acres	0
Private/Non-Federal Inholdings, Count:	number	0
Outstanding or Reserved Subsurface Mineral Rights:	acres	5,981.4
Current Bald Management Area:	acres	0
Forest Research Plots, Count:	number	2



Name: Slide Hollow

Acres: 199 acres

Description of Area

Location & Access

The Slide Hollow area is located in Avery County on the Appalachian Ranger District and is adjacent to the Cherokee NF in Tennessee. State Route 1305, which intersects with Elk Falls Road (NFSR190), is the main point of access into the area on the northern border. The Appalachian Trail runs adjacent to the northwestern corner of the area for a short distance.

Surroundings

Area boundaries are generally contiguous and follow the Slide Hollow Inventoried Roadless Area boundary. The western boundary is contiguous with the 4,395 acre Slide Hollow Inventoried Roadless Area on the Cherokee NF; the eastern and northern borders are adjacent to Pisgah NF land, and the southern border is adjacent to private land; land use to the south is mainly agricultural. The eastern boundary follows a cleared transmission line corridor. There are three wildlife openings maintained along the edge of the area off of Elk Falls Road (NFSR190).

Topography & Vegetation

The area is just south of the Elk River with the northern and eastern boundaries being on the edge of the small river valley. Elevation ranges from 3,500 feet on Little Pine Mountain to 2,700 feet near the Elk River. The predominant ecozones represented in the area include acidic cove, rich cove, mesic oak, and pine-oak/heath.

Current Uses

There are three maintained wildlife openings along the edge of the area off of Elk Falls Road (NFSR190). There are no NFS trails or roads located in the area. NFSR190 along the eastern and northern boundary of the area is used by the Cherokee NF for mechanical mowing of wildlife openings on the Watauga Ranger District.

Evaluation of Wilderness Characteristics

Apparent Naturalness

The area has experienced significant logging in the past and the forest is hardwood regrowth. There is evidence of past human activities, including an old logging road. There are wildlife openings in the northeast, and a Forest Service road along the northern and eastern boundary that is mowed to access wildlife fields north of the area. The area is part of the 4,395 Slide Hollow Inventoried Roadless Area which is primarily on the Cherokee NF and as such there are no recent roads in the area. There is an old road transecting the area from east to west. There is a cleared transmission line corridor along the entire eastern edge of the area.

Opportunities for Solitude or Primitive & Unconfined Recreation

While opportunities for solitude may exist in the area, especially along the western boundary, the evaluation area is small and sights and sounds from activities on adjacent lands may be evident throughout the area. There are no established trails within the area. Elk Falls Road to the east provides access to Elk Falls, a popular recreation area, and sights and sounds from that area detract from solitude,

particularly during the summer months. Private agricultural land and two state routes are within 1/3 of a mile to the southern border of the area.

Other Values - Unique or Outstanding Qualities

There are no unique or outstanding qualities in this area.

Size & Manageability

At 199 acres, the Slide Hollow area may not be of sufficient size to practically manage make its preservation and use in an unimpaired on its own, and it was considered here in the context of the larger Slide Hollow Inventoried Roadless Area which extends onto the Cherokee NF for a total of 4,395 acres of contiguous Inventoried Roadless Area. The Cherokee NF did not recommend the Slide Hollow area for wilderness as part of the Forest Plan Revision in 2004. The area boundaries are relatively contiguous and follow the Inventoried Roadless Area boundary. The southern boundary is adjacent to private land, and all other boundaries are adjacent to national forest system lands. The eastern boundary is adjacent to a cleared transmission line corridor. Outstanding subsurface mineral rights exist in the northern two-thirds of the area, for a total of 131 acres.

Summary

The entire Slide Hollow area is within the Slide Hollow Inventoried Roadless Area, and is contiguous with the Inventoried Roadless Area on the Cherokee NF. Potential sights or sounds of adjacent lands, including heavy use waterfall areas and private lands, detract from naturalness and opportunities for solitude. An old logging road crosses the area and provides evidence of past management in the area.

Quantitative Summary of Items/Activities within the Slide Hollow Area

Disclaimer: Information was generated from FS spatial datasets. All figures are approximate.

Description of Area	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Spruce-Fir Ecozone:	acres	0
Northern Hardwood Ecozone:	acres	1.7
High Elevation Red Oak Ecozone:	acres	0.1
Acidic Cove Ecozone:	acres	61.1
Rich Cove Ecozone:	acres	31.4
Mesic Oak Ecozone:	acres	87.2
Dry-Mesic Oak Ecozone:	acres	1.4
Dry Oak Ecozone:	acres	5.5
Pine-Oak/Heath Ecozone:	acres	9.8
Shortleaf Pine Ecozone:	acres	0
Alluvial Forest Ecozone:	acres	0

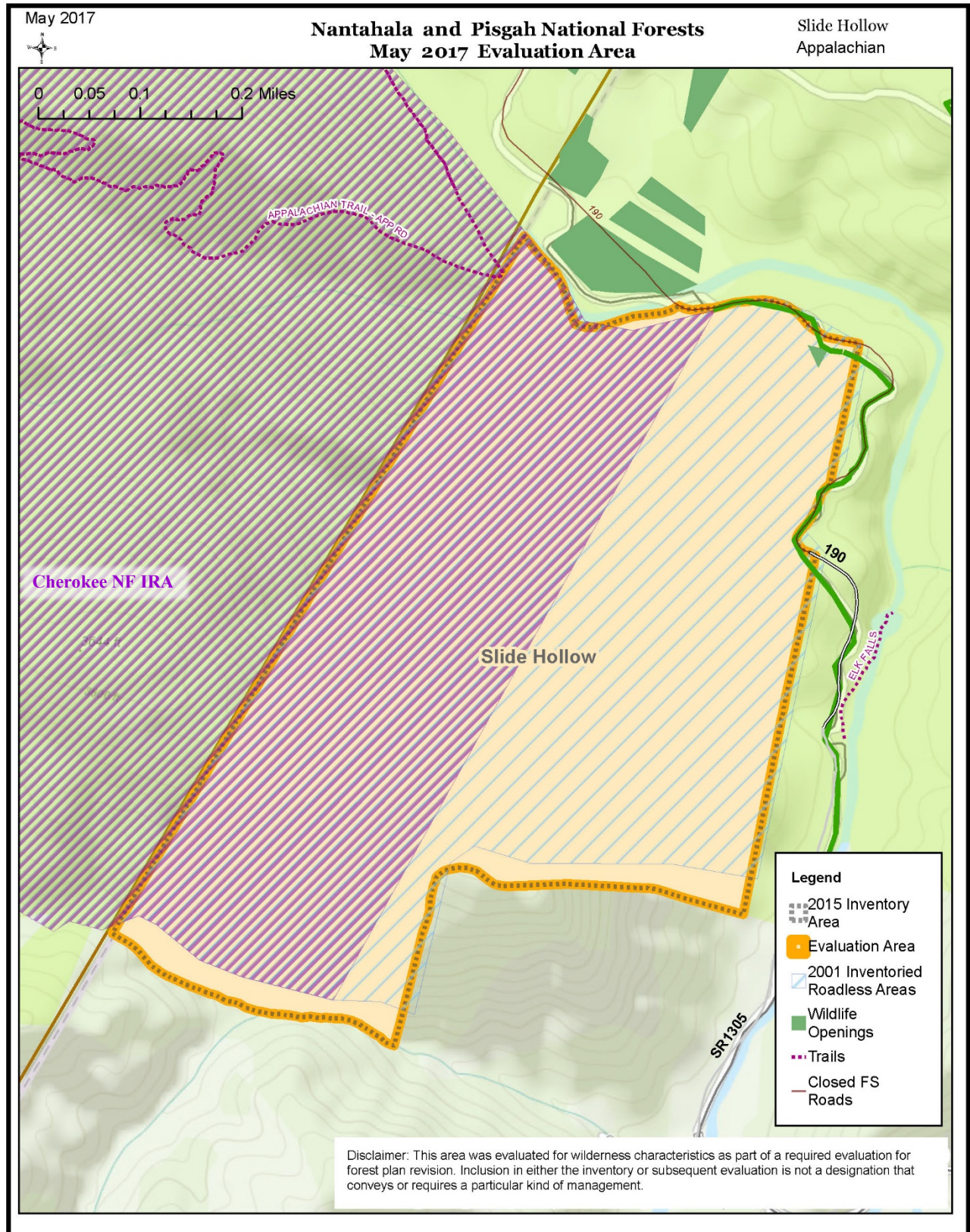
Apparent Naturalness	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Maintenance Level 1 National Forest System Roads:	miles	0
Closed Maintenance Level 2 National Forest System Roads:	miles	0.1
Road Stream Crossings, Bridge:	number	0
Road Stream Crossings, Other:	number	0
Trail Stream Crossings, Bridge:	number	0
Vegetation Management, 0-20 years old:	acres	0
Vegetation Management, 21-40 years old:	acres	0
Maintained Wildlife Fields (may overlap Bald Management Area):	acres	0.5
Existing Wilderness Study Area (WSA):	acres	0
Existing Inventoried Roadless Area (IRA may overlap WSA):	acres	188.3

Solitude or Primitive & Unconfined Recreation	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Current Backcountry Management Area (may overlap WSA & IRA):	acres	0
Inventoried Primitive Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) Setting:	acres	0
Inventoried Semi-Primitive Non-Motorized ROS Setting:	acres	3.5

	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Solitude or Primitive & Unconfined Recreation		
Inventoried Semi-Primitive Motorized ROS Setting (buffer of adjacent roads):	acres	0
Inventoried Roded Natural ROS Setting (buffer of adjacent roads):	acres	195.3
National Forest System Trail, Hike-only Allowed Use:	miles	0.0
National Forest System Trail, Hike-Bike Allowed Use:	miles	0
National Forest System Trail, Hike-Horse Allowed Use:	miles	0
National Forest System Trail, Hike-Bike-Horse Allowed Use:	miles	0

	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Unique & Outstanding Features		
Current Special Interest Management Area (scenic, geologic, botanical, zoological):	acres	0
Current Designated Wild & Scenic River Corridor (1/4 mile each side):	acres	0
Current Eligible Wild & Scenic River Corridor (1/4 mile each side):	acres	0
Research Natural Area:	acres	0

	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Size & Manageability		
Area, Total:	acres	198.9
Private/Non-Federal Inholdings, Total:	acres	0
Private/Non-Federal Inholdings, Count:	number	0
Outstanding or Reserved Subsurface Mineral Rights:	acres	131.7
Current Bald Management Area:	acres	0
Forest Research Plots, Count:	number	0



Cheoah Ranger District

Name: Cheoah Bald

Acres: 9,400 acres

Description of Area

Location & Access

The Cheoah Bald area is in Swain and Graham Counties on the Cheoah Ranger District of the Nantahala NF. The area is defined by the Cheoah massif with the surrounding slopes, valleys, and minor ridges falling away in all directions but mostly to the southeast and the northwest. The area is bounded by the Nantahala River Gorge and US19/74 to the southeast.

The area, which lies about six miles due east of Robbinsville, NC, can be accessed by a number of roads, listed here in a counter-clockwise direction beginning on the north side of the area at: Shell Stand Road (NFSR418) which is an open road that is excluded from the area and runs along the northern border and into the area for a cherry-stem shaped exclusion; Stecoah Gap Road (NFSR2610) which runs along the northern side of a significant protrusion that extends partly into non-federal lands; S. Fork Beech Dr. Road (SR1223) which bounds the southern edge of the next protrusion to the south; Nolton Ridge Road (NFSR259) which follows Nolton Ridge up to the southwestern edge into a portion of the area that contains maintained wildlife fields and closed Forest Service roads that serve as linear wildlife openings (NFSR259A and 259B).

Trails that access the area include: a section of the Bartram Trail (NFST67), Bear Creek Trail (NFST62), Locust Cove Trail (NFST404), Rock Creek Trail (NFST405), and the Appalachian National Scenic Trail.

Surroundings

The area's northern and eastern boundaries mostly border other national forest lands, while much of the irregular western boundary borders private lands. Area boundaries are highly irregular and there are long narrow protrusions to the west which are surrounded by private lands. State Road 143 also passes near the area to the west. An open NFS road forms a cherry-stemmed exclusion into the area from the north. Surrounding communities include the Nantahala Township to the southeast, the Stecoah Township to the north, and the Cheoah Township to the west. The eastern boundary follows US 19/74 in the Nantahala River Gorge. The very heavily used Nantahala River, developed recreation sites, and an active railroad track and large limestone quarry are also located along the eastern border. (Note: The Nantahala Talc and Limestone Quarry operates under permit on the Nantahala NF, and was inadvertently mapped as being within the Cheoah Bald area. However, this evaluation addresses it as being outside the area.)

Topography & Vegetation

This area is primarily formed by the Cheoah Bald ridge and the lands and streams that fall downslope from the ridge line. Steep and rugged terrain leads up to the ridge top balds with elevations ranging from about 2,400 feet near the Nantahala River at the northeast corner to Cheoah Bald at 5,062 feet. High points of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park and other Nantahala Forest lands are relatively close. In addition to Cheoah Bald, other significant locations along the ridge-line include Little Bald, Bellcollar Gap, Sassafras Gap, Swim Bald, the Jump-up, Grassy Top, Grassy Gap, and Tyre Knob.

Ecozones within the area include rich cove, dry mesic oak, mesic oak, dry oak, and acidic cove ecozones. Several rare species are found in the area including trailing wolfsbane, purple sedge, rock skullcap, mountain catchfly, sweet trillium, red turtlehead, and northern lowbush blueberry.

Current Uses

The Cheoah Bald area is managed for backcountry recreation, the Appalachian National Scenic Trail corridor, and for timber and wildlife. The area contains a range of dispersed recreation opportunities, but its primary attractions are hiking, backpacking, scenery, forest product gathering (ginseng, blueberries, ramps, etc.), hunting, and fishing. Much of the area is also identified as an Inventoried Roadless Area.

Part of Cheoah Bald area is managed for maintaining open conditions on Cheoah Bald, and there are several wildlife fields and linear wildlife openings south and east of Cheoah Bald itself. Nolton Ridge Road provides public vehicular access during the fall foliage season and is also a popular access road for hunting; NFS Road 418 is also seasonally open for hunting. There have been no timber harvests in the area in the last 20 years, but over 300 acres were harvested between 21-40 years ago.

The area has 30 miles of hiking trails. The Bartram Trail (NFSR67) runs from US 19/74 at Beechertown up Nolton Ridge and terminates at its intersection with the Appalachian Trail on Cheoah Bald. The Appalachian Trail enters the area at Grassy Gap near Nantahala Outdoor Center on US 19/74 in Wesser, crosses Cheoah Bald, and exits the area at Stecoah Gap on SR143. Bear Creek Trail (NFST62) leads from Bear Creek off of US129 in a northeasterly direction to enter the area on Nolton Ridge where it intersects the seasonally open Nolton Ridge Road.

Evaluation of Wilderness Characteristics

Apparent Naturalness

Much of the Cheoah Bald area has natural appearing conditions; however, evidence of past logging and road building is apparent in many locations. The open bald generally has a natural appearance, but has historically been maintained by mowing and prescribed fire. Within the area, there are approximately 15 acres of maintained wildlife fields, over 5 miles of low maintenance level NFS roads, and the Appalachian Trail Sassafras Gap Shelter, all of which adversely affect naturalness.

Opportunities for Solitude or Primitive & Unconfined Recreation

The Cheoah Bald area provides opportunities for solitude in some places, but sights and sounds of nearby communities, adjacent highways, open NFS roads, a railroad, and a limestone quarry impact solitude in many locations along the periphery. Sights and sounds of commercial development, river traffic, and heavy use impacts solitude along the entire US highway 19/74 (Nantahala River) corridor to the east. The occasional sights and sounds of equipment maintaining wildlife fields to the south and southeast also negatively affects solitude but these impacts are infrequent. Opportunities for solitude are also affected by the high probability of visitor encounters in the immediate vicinity of the Appalachian Trail and Bartram Trail during seasons of high trail use. These are very popular segments of both trails due to their connections to Nantahala River Gorge and multiple access points at Stecoah Gap, Beechertown, and Wesser.

The area contains about 30 miles of hike-only trails, which provide many opportunities for primitive recreation. However, irregular area boundaries on the west side form several narrow arms and cherry-stemmed roads that tend to confine recreation use in areas to the south, west, and northeast.

Other Values - Unique or Outstanding Qualities

Cheoah Bald itself is a destination for hikers, backpackers, and those viewing fall foliage. It's one of the highest open balds in the area, with scenic views of the Unicoi, Snowbird, Nantahala, and Great Smoky Mountains. A variety of rare plant and animal species are found in the area, and there are forests with old growth characteristics. The area also contains 664 acres of eligible Wild and Scenic River corridor along the Nantahala River. There are three State Natural Heritage Areas within the Cheoah Bald Area.

Size & Manageability

The area has irregular boundaries with several narrow arms extending to the south, west and northeast. Some of them are surrounded by developed private lands. This boundary configuration would make it difficult to manage the area to preserve wilderness characteristics. The core interior of the area is unroaded and has a higher degree of wilderness characteristics than the area outside of the Inventoried Roadless Area. Approximately 2% of the area has outstanding or reserved subsurface mineral rights.

Summary

Much of the area is natural appearing, particularly on the ridges and northeastern slopes, but apparent naturalness of the area is impacted by low maintenance level NFS roads and maintained wildlife fields to the south and southeast of Cheoah Bald. Area boundaries form several narrow arms to the west, south, and north; some of which are less than 0.2 miles wide, two or more miles long, and predominately surrounded by private lands. This boundary configuration restricts users to narrow strips of National Forest System lands in those areas, and negatively affects opportunities for primitive and unconfined recreation outside of the core inventoried roadless area. Solitude is also impacted along the periphery of the area by sights and sounds of NC143 to the west, US19, and an active railroad in the Nantahala River Gorge to the east, and sounds of blasting from a nearby quarry. Opportunities for solitude are also affected by the high visitor use on trails in the area.

Quantitative Summary of Items/Activities within the Cheoah Bald Area

Disclaimer: Information was generated from FS spatial datasets. All figures are approximate.

Description of Area	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Spruce-Fir Ecozone:	acres	222.5
Northern Hardwood Ecozone:	acres	642.9
High Elevation Red Oak Ecozone:	acres	213.7
Acidic Cove Ecozone:	acres	663.0
Rich Cove Ecozone:	acres	4,083.5
Mesic Oak Ecozone:	acres	1,093.5
Dry-Mesic Oak Ecozone:	acres	1,128.2
Dry Oak Ecozone:	acres	790.3
Pine-Oak/Heath Ecozone:	acres	541.8
Shortleaf Pine Ecozone:	acres	13.4
Alluvial Forest Ecozone:	acres	0.4

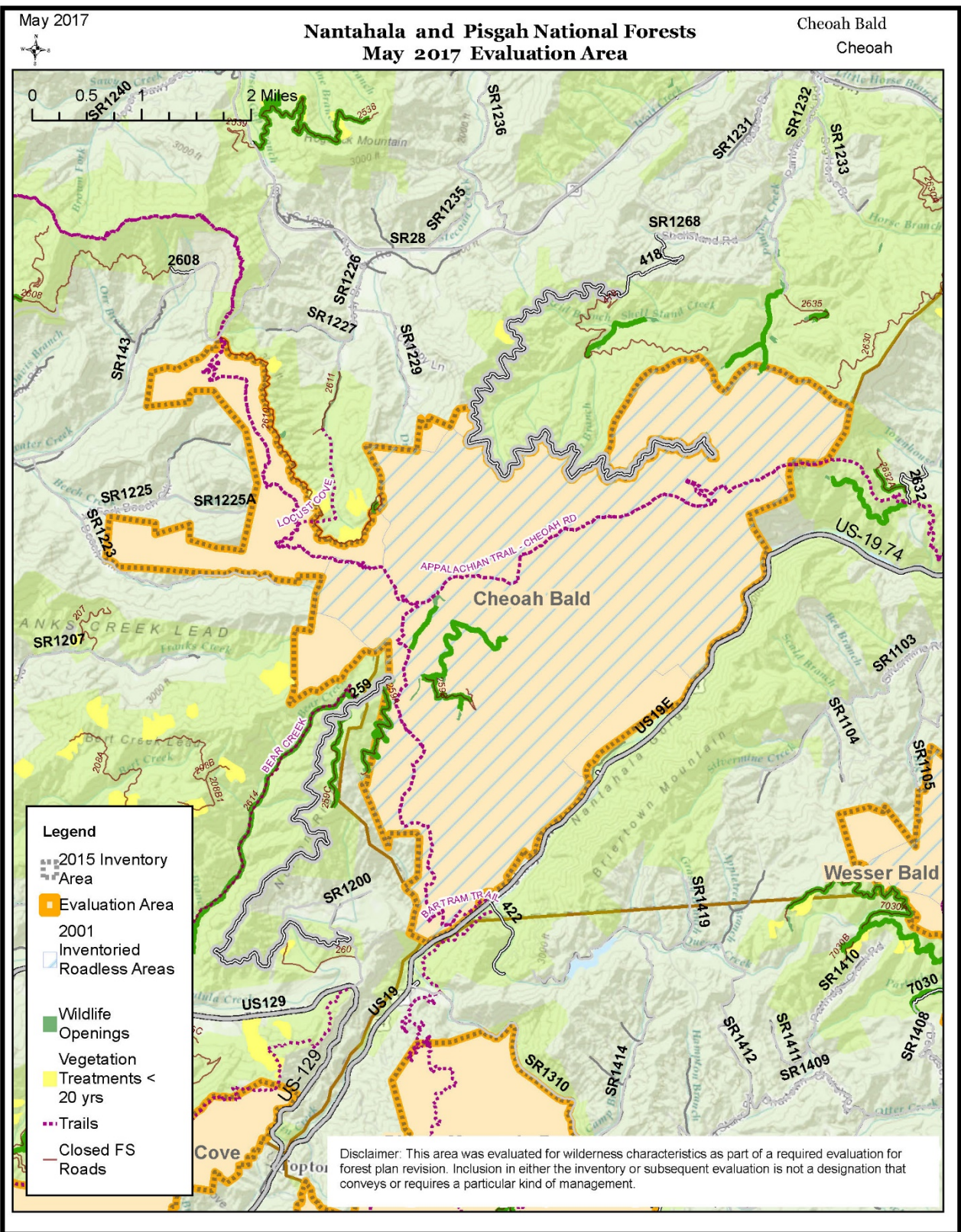
Apparent Naturalness	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Maintenance Level 1 National Forest System Roads:	miles	3.6
Closed Maintenance Level 2 National Forest System Roads:	miles	1.7
Road Stream Crossings, Bridge:	number	0
Road Stream Crossings, Other:	number	4
Trail Stream Crossings, Bridge:	number	0
Vegetation Management, 0-20 years old:	acres	0.1
Vegetation Management, 21-40 years old:	acres	313.1
Maintained Wildlife Fields (may overlap Bald Management Area):	acres	14.8
Existing Wilderness Study Area (WSA):	acres	0
Existing Inventoried Roadless Area (IRA may overlap WSA):	acres	7,689.9

Solitude or Primitive & Unconfined Recreation	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Current Backcountry Management Area (may overlap WSA & IRA):	acres	5,756.7
Inventoried Primitive Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) Setting:	acres	0
Inventoried Semi-Primitive Non-Motorized ROS Setting:	acres	1,920.6

	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Solitude or Primitive & Unconfined Recreation		
Inventoried Semi-Primitive Motorized ROS Setting (buffer of adjacent roads):	acres	4,678.1
Inventoried Roded Natural ROS Setting (buffer of adjacent roads):	acres	2,800.6
National Forest System Trail, Hike-only Allowed Use:	miles	30.0
National Forest System Trail, Hike-Bike Allowed Use:	miles	0
National Forest System Trail, Hike-Horse Allowed Use:	miles	0
National Forest System Trail, Hike-Bike-Horse Allowed Use:	miles	0

	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Unique & Outstanding Features		
Current Special Interest Management Area (scenic, geologic, botanical, zoological):	acres	0
Current Designated Wild & Scenic River Corridor (1/4 mile each side):	acres	0
Current Eligible Wild & Scenic River Corridor (1/4 mile each side):	acres	664.1
Research Natural Area:	acres	0

	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Size & Manageability		
Area, Total:	acres	9,400.0
Private/Non-Federal Inholdings, Total:	acres	0
Private/Non-Federal Inholdings, Count:	number	0
Outstanding or Reserved Subsurface Mineral Rights:	acres	211.6
Current Bald Management Area:	acres	0
Forest Research Plots, Count:	number	0



Name: Joyce Kilmer-Slickrock Wilderness Extension #1

Acres: 3,553 acres

Description of Area

Location & Access

The Joyce Kilmer-Slickrock Wilderness Extension #1 area is on the Cheoah Ranger District of the Nantahala NF in Graham County, NC. It is adjacent to Joyce Kilmer-Slickrock Wilderness, south of Stratton Bald and Horse Cove Ridge, east of Cherohala Skyway, and north of National Forest System (NFS) Road 81 (Santeetlah Creek Road). Access to the area is from the Cherohala Skyway, Wolf Laurel Road (NFSR81F), Santeetlah Creek Road (NFSR81), and several NFS trails. Trailheads include Stewart Cabin, Swan Meadows, Wolf Laurel, Beech Gap, and others. The area also has several closed low-maintenance level roads which are used as trails.

Surroundings

The area is completely surrounded by NFS lands of the Nantahala and Cherokee NFs. The northern boundary abuts Joyce Kilmer-Slickrock Wilderness in NC and Citico Creek Wilderness in Tennessee. The southern boundary is along NFSR81, and the western boundary follows the Cherohala Skyway.

Outside the area, on NFS lands there are dispersed campsites along Santeetlah Creek, dispersed horse camping near Stewart Cabin (a historical log cabin), and Swan Cabin which can be reserved for overnight use.

Topography & Vegetation

Much of the area has steep and rugged terrain and is located primarily on a south facing slope. The northern boundary follows the narrow Horse Cove Ridge, to Stratton Bald (now forested), Bob Bald, and on to Strawberry Knob and Beech Gap. The highest point is 5,341 feet in elevation at Stratton Bald, and the lowest is 2,400 feet along Santeetlah Creek Road; a 2,941 foot change in elevation.

The area is covered with dense hardwood forests on the uplands and dead and dying hemlocks along stream channels. Bob Bald is an open heath bald. Dominant ecozones include high-elevation red oak, mesic oak, and acidic cove.

Current Uses

Much of the area is currently managed for timber and wildlife management, and there is an active timber sale and wildlife habitat improvement project in the area. Portions of the area along the high ridges are managed for scenic protection and backcountry recreation. There are 7.5 miles of hiking trail in the area and 10.6 miles of closed NFS roads, many of which are used for horseback riding, wagon trains, and mountain biking. The area is also popular with hunters and fishermen.

Evaluation of Wilderness Characteristics

Apparent Naturalness

The area has many natural appearing areas on the steeper slopes and higher elevations, but there is an active timber sale, wildlife habitat improvement, and Golden-Winged Warbler research project underway adjacent to NFSR81F. Treatments associated with this project include two-age shelterwood timber harvests and associated skid roads and log landings, all of which will affect naturalness. The area

also has 24 acres of wildlife fields which are maintained by mowing, and over 10 miles of low-maintenance level NFS roads, many of which are mowed as wildlife fields and used by wagon trains.

Opportunities for Solitude or Primitive & Unconfined Recreation

Some locations within the area offer opportunities for solitude, especially along the high ridges adjacent to Joyce Kilmer-Slickrock Wilderness; however, the area is situated across the drainage from the Cherohala Skyway where noise from cars, trucks, and motorcycles is evident year-round. Other nearby NFS roads along Santeetlah Creek, and those accessing Swan Cabin and Wolf Laurel trailhead have seasonal traffic. Wolf Laurel Road almost entirely splits the area in half. Low-maintenance level NFS roads within the area are often used by large equestrian groups and occasional wagon trains which impact opportunities for solitude.

Opportunities for primitive and unconfined recreation exist across most of the area, but are mixed with uses not considered to be primitive. Primitive recreation activities within the area include hunting, fishing, hiking, backpacking, horseback riding, and backcountry recreation. Activities inconsistent with wilderness characteristics include wagon trains and mountain bike use on closed NFS roads.

Other Values - Unique or Outstanding Qualities

The area's high ridges, knobs, heath balds, and dense hardwood forests are scenic, and serve as the backdrop for visitors along the Cherohala Skyway, a National Scenic Byway. There are stands in the area with old growth characteristics, and area streams are high quality trout waters.

Size & Manageability

This area is adjacent to Joyce Kilmer-Slickrock Wilderness. The area has many features and uses adversely affecting the ability to manage for wilderness characteristics. It also has a long and narrow shape, and boundary configurations are irregular due to open roads. The open Wolf Laurel Road almost splits the area in half, but there are no non-federal inholdings, rights of way, or outstanding subsurface mineral rights.

Summary

Ongoing projects, the distribution of wildlife fields and old roads across the area adversely affect naturalness in all but the highest ridges and steepest slopes. Although Joyce Kilmer-Slickrock Wilderness Extension #1 area is adjacent to wilderness and has many scenic locations, the combination and distribution of uses and improvements limits opportunities for solitude across the area. Additionally, the shape and configuration of the area does not lend itself well to wilderness management.

Quantitative Summary of Items/Activities within the Joyce Kilmer-Slickrock Wilderness Extension #1 Area

Disclaimer: Information was generated from FS spatial datasets. All figures are approximate.

Description of Area	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Spruce-Fir Ecozone:	acres	68.9
Northern Hardwood Ecozone:	acres	322.2
High Elevation Red Oak Ecozone:	acres	555.8
Acidic Cove Ecozone:	acres	755.6
Rich Cove Ecozone:	acres	274.6
Mesic Oak Ecozone:	acres	1,091.1
Dry-Mesic Oak Ecozone:	acres	168.6
Dry Oak Ecozone:	acres	46.2
Pine-Oak/Heath Ecozone:	acres	245.4
Shortleaf Pine Ecozone:	acres	0
Alluvial Forest Ecozone:	acres	0

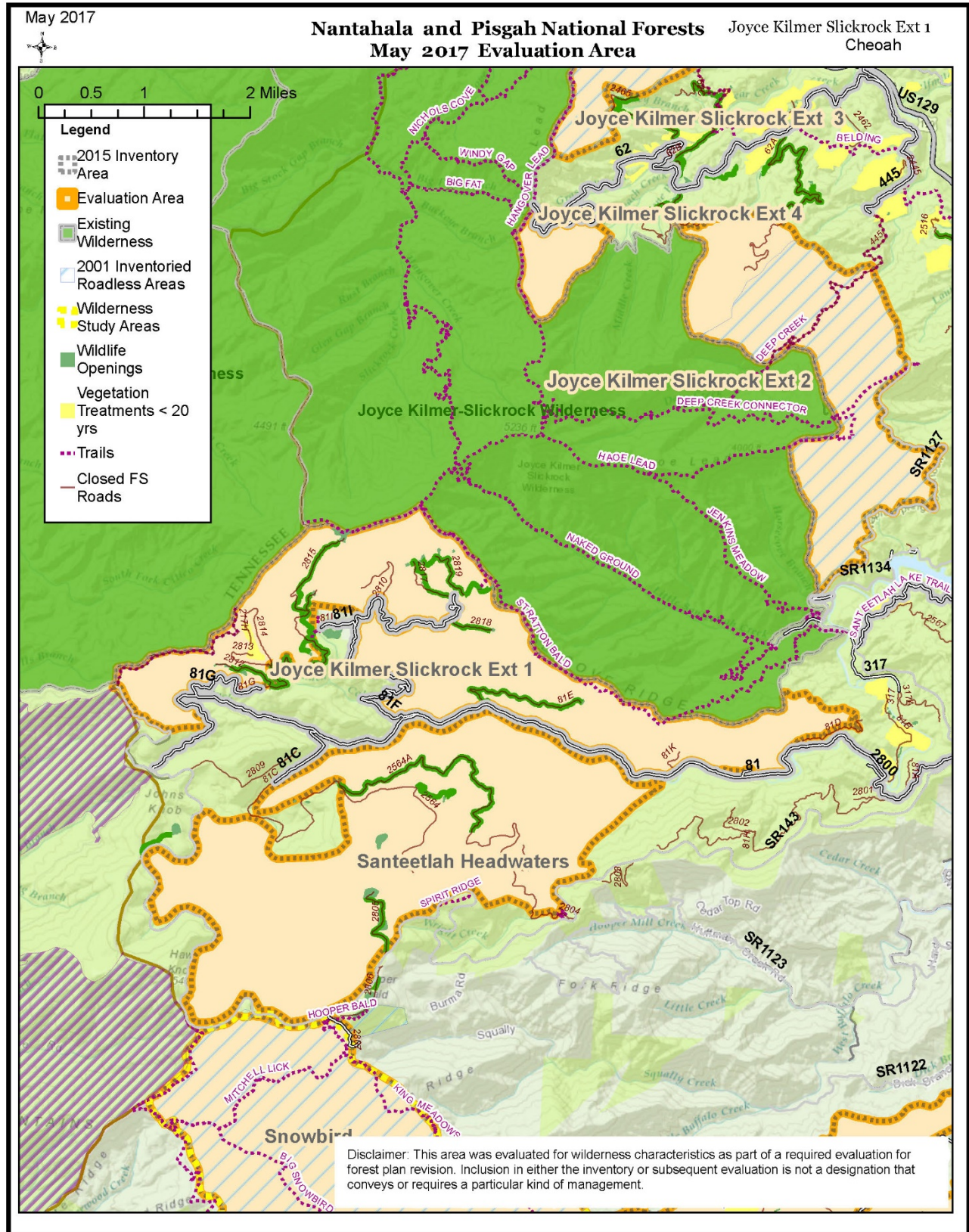
Apparent Naturalness	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Maintenance Level 1 National Forest System Roads:	miles	5.1
Closed Maintenance Level 2 National Forest System Roads:	miles	5.5
Road Stream Crossings, Bridge:	number	0
Road Stream Crossings, Other:	number	10
Trail Stream Crossings, Bridge:	number	0
Vegetation Management, 0-20 years old:	acres	0
Vegetation Management, 21-40 years old:	acres	363.5
Maintained Wildlife Fields (may overlap Bald Management Area):	acres	24.0
Existing Wilderness Study Area (WSA):	acres	0
Existing Inventoried Roadless Area (IRA may overlap WSA):	acres	0

Solitude or Primitive & Unconfined Recreation	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Current Backcountry Management Area (may overlap WSA & IRA):	acres	224.8
Inventoried Primitive Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) Setting:	acres	0

	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Solitude or Primitive & Unconfined Recreation		
Inventoried Semi-Primitive Non-Motorized ROS Setting:	acres	3.5
Inventoried Semi-Primitive Motorized ROS Setting (buffer of adjacent roads):	acres	280.1
Inventoried Roaded Natural ROS Setting (buffer of adjacent roads):	acres	3,246.1
National Forest System Trail, Hike-only Allowed Use:	miles	7.5
National Forest System Trail, Hike-Bike Allowed Use:	miles	0
National Forest System Trail, Hike-Horse Allowed Use:	miles	0
National Forest System Trail, Hike-Bike-Horse Allowed Use:	miles	0

	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Unique & Outstanding Features		
Current Special Interest Management Area (scenic, geologic, botanical, zoological):	acres	0
Current Designated Wild & Scenic River Corridor (1/4 mile each side):	acres	0
Current Eligible Wild & Scenic River Corridor (1/4 mile each side):	acres	0
Research Natural Area:	acres	0

	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Size & Manageability		
Area, Total:	acres	3,553.5
Private/Non-Federal Inholdings, Total:	acres	0
Private/Non-Federal Inholdings, Count:	number	0
Outstanding or Reserved Subsurface Mineral Rights:	acres	0
Current Bald Management Area:	acres	0
Forest Research Plots, Count:	number	0



Name: **Joyce Kilmer-Slickrock Wilderness Extension #2, Deep Creek/Avey Creek**

Acres: **2,313 acres**

Description of Area

Location & Access

The Joyce Kilmer-Slickrock Wilderness Extension #2 Deep Creek/Avey Creek area is on the Cheoah Ranger District of the Nantahala NF in Graham County, NC. It is adjacent to Joyce Kilmer-Slickrock Wilderness, east of Hangover Lead and Haoe Lead, which are prominent ridges in the wilderness. Access to the area is from Haoe Lead/Maple Springs trailhead on SR1127 and National Forest System (NFS) Trail 46 (Deep Creek Trail), which follows the maintenance level 1 NFS Road 445 (Deep Creek Road). A closed maintenance level 2 road enters the area from the northeast, called Barker Creek Road (NFSR62A), which originates on Big Fat Gap Road (NFSR62).

Surroundings

The area is completely surrounded by NFS lands with the southeastern boundary along SR1127, and western boundaries adjoining Joyce Kilmer-Slickrock Wilderness.

Topography & Vegetation

Much of the area is steep and rugged terrain. Several high ridges have rock outcrops, and stream gradients are steep with large boulders and numerous waterfalls. The highest point is 4,240 feet at Rock Creek Knob and the lowest is 1,960 feet along Deep Creek; a 2,280 foot change in elevation. The area is covered with dense hardwood forests on the uplands and dead and dying hemlocks along stream channels. Dominant ecozones include rich cove, mesic oak, dry-mesic oak, and acidic cove.

Current Uses

The area is currently managed for timber and wildlife management, although there have been no maintained wildlife fields or timber harvests within the past 20 years. In 2001, most of the area was identified as an Inventoried Roadless Area and is now managed primarily for backcountry recreation. There are approximately four miles of hiking trail in the area; two miles of which are on a maintenance level 1 NFS road called Deep Creek. There is another 1.2 miles of closed maintenance level 2 NFS road in the northeast at Barker Creek, which is used for fire management.

Evaluation of Wilderness Characteristics

Apparent Naturalness

There are closed NFS roads and overgrown skid roads in the area that detract from naturalness in their immediate vicinity but the area is otherwise natural appearing. There are no known structures and no highly developed trails or bridges.

Opportunities for Solitude or Primitive & Unconfined Recreation

Trails in the area are not heavily used, so encounters with other visitors are limited. Impacts to solitude come from sights and sounds of vehicles on SR1127, which receives a moderate level of traffic and terminates at the Maple Springs overlook. This road is the location of the annual Dragon Hillclimb event which is a very popular timed car race which draws hundreds of visitors and vehicles every year. Impacts to solitude from this event are primarily confined to one or two weekends a year.

The area offers many opportunities for primitive recreation. All the trails are minimally developed hiking trails, there is backcountry angling and hunting available, and many opportunities for wildlife viewing.

Other Values - Unique or Outstanding Qualities

Area streams are high quality trout waters, several of which originate in the undisturbed lands of Joyce Kilmer-Slickrock Wilderness.

Size & Manageability

At 2,313 acres, the area may not be of sufficient size to practically manage make its preservation and use in an unimpaired condition; however, this area would be considered as an extension to Joyce Kilmer-Slickrock Wilderness. Manageability for wilderness characteristics would be difficult on the border adjacent to SR1127 due to the noise from traffic and the heavy use of the road during the annual Dragon Hill Climb event.

Summary

The Joyce Kilmer-Slickrock Wilderness Extension #2, Deep Creek/Avey Creek area is predominately natural appearing with the exception of the approximately three miles of closed roads that extend into the area. There are opportunities for solitude, and for primitive and unconfined recreation most of the year, but impacts from the Dragon Hill Climb event on SR1127 impacts solitude due to the high amount of traffic and visitors during the event. The area is relatively small, however, this area could be considered as an extension to Joyce Kilmer-Slickrock Wilderness.

Quantitative Summary of Items/Activities within the Joyce Kilmer-Slickrock Wilderness Extension #2, Deep Creek/Avey Creek Area

Disclaimer: Information was generated from FS spatial datasets. All figures are approximate.

Description of Area	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Spruce-Fir Ecozone:	acres	0
Northern Hardwood Ecozone:	acres	21.4
High Elevation Red Oak Ecozone:	acres	23.1
Acidic Cove Ecozone:	acres	205.6
Rich Cove Ecozone:	acres	860.3
Mesic Oak Ecozone:	acres	679.6
Dry-Mesic Oak Ecozone:	acres	407.7
Dry Oak Ecozone:	acres	34.8
Pine-Oak/Heath Ecozone:	acres	80.6
Shortleaf Pine Ecozone:	acres	0.1
Alluvial Forest Ecozone:	acres	0

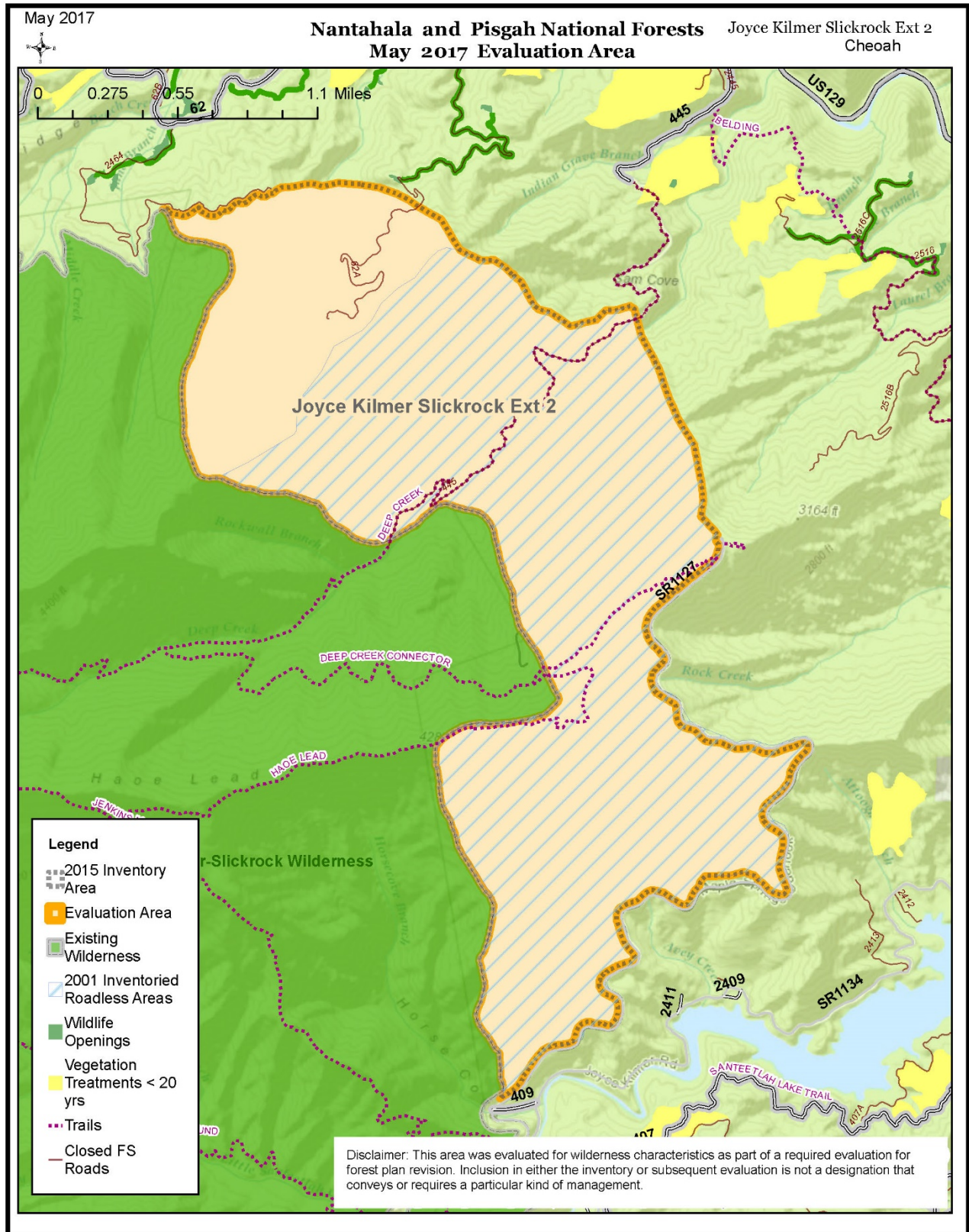
Apparent Naturalness	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Maintenance Level 1 National Forest System Roads:	miles	2.0
Closed Maintenance Level 2 National Forest System Roads:	miles	1.2
Road Stream Crossings, Bridge:	number	0
Road Stream Crossings, Other:	number	5
Trail Stream Crossings, Bridge:	number	0
Vegetation Management, 0-20 years old:	acres	0
Vegetation Management, 21-40 years old:	acres	315.2
Maintained Wildlife Fields (may overlap Bald Management Area):	acres	0
Existing Wilderness Study Area (WSA):	acres	0
Existing Inventoried Roadless Area (IRA may overlap WSA):	acres	1,853.3

Solitude or Primitive & Unconfined Recreation	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Current Backcountry Management Area (may overlap WSA & IRA):	acres	0
Inventoried Primitive Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) Setting:	acres	0

	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Solitude or Primitive & Unconfined Recreation		
Inventoried Semi-Primitive Non-Motorized ROS Setting:	acres	151.8
Inventoried Semi-Primitive Motorized ROS Setting (buffer of adjacent roads):	acres	1,039.0
Inventoried Roaded Natural ROS Setting (buffer of adjacent roads):	acres	1,122.5
National Forest System Trail, Hike-only Allowed Use:	miles	3.9
National Forest System Trail, Hike-Bike Allowed Use:	miles	0
National Forest System Trail, Hike-Horse Allowed Use:	miles	0
National Forest System Trail, Hike-Bike-Horse Allowed Use:	miles	0

	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Unique & Outstanding Features		
Current Special Interest Management Area (scenic, geologic, botanical, zoological):	acres	0
Current Designated Wild & Scenic River Corridor (1/4 mile each side):	acres	0
Current Eligible Wild & Scenic River Corridor (1/4 mile each side):	acres	0
Research Natural Area:	acres	0

	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Size & Manageability		
Area, Total:	acres	2313.3
Private/Non-Federal Inholdings, Total:	acres	0
Private/Non-Federal Inholdings, Count:	number	0
Outstanding or Reserved Subsurface Mineral Rights:	acres	0
Current Bald Management Area:	acres	0
Forest Research Plots, Count:	number	0



Name: Joyce Kilmer-Slickrock Wilderness Extension #3, Yellowhammer Branch

Acres: 1,207 acres

Description of Area

Location & Access

The Joyce Kilmer-Slickrock Wilderness Extension #3, Yellowhammer Branch area, is on the Cheoah Ranger District of the Nantahala NF in Graham County, NC. It is adjacent to the northeastern boundary of Joyce Kilmer-Slickrock Wilderness and lies east of Hangover Lead. Access to the area is from SR129 at Tapoco and from National Forest System (NFS) Trails 42, 45, 52, and 56. The Benton Mackaye trail passes through the area on the Ike Branch Trail.

Surroundings

The area is surrounded by NFS lands to the south, southeast, and west, where it adjoins Joyce Kilmer-Slickrock Wilderness. The northern boundary is near Calderwood Lake, and to the northeast is private land near Tapoco where there are residences, a lodge, and U.S. Highway 129.

Topography & Vegetation

Much of the area consists of steep and rugged terrain, from the high ridge of Hangover Lead to Yellowhammer Branch. Stream gradients are also steep with many large boulders and small waterfalls. The highest point is 3,252 feet in elevation on Hangover Lead, and the lowest is 1,200 feet near Calderwood Lake.

The area is covered with dense hardwood forests in the uplands and rhododendron and hemlock along stream channels. Most of the hemlocks are dead from infestations of the hemlock woolly adelgid. Dominant ecozones include mesic oak, dry-mesic oak, and acidic cove.

Current Uses

The Yellowhammer Branch area is currently managed for backcountry recreation and is also entirely within the Yellowhammer Branch Inventoried Roadless Area. The area has no maintained wildlife fields, recent timber harvests within the past 20 years, and has no NFS roads. There are approximately four miles of hiking trail, all of which connect to Joyce Kilmer-Slickrock Wilderness. Although the area is very remote, it is used for hunting and backcountry angling.

Evaluation of Wilderness Characteristics

Apparent Naturalness

The Yellowhammer Branch area is predominately natural appearing, with no structures, highly developed trails, nor any NFS roads. There is some evidence of past logging roads which are largely unnoticeable to the average forest visitor. There is a trail bridge just outside the area to the north on NFS Trail 42.

Opportunities for Solitude or Primitive & Unconfined Recreation

This area is entirely surrounded by National Forest lands, and borders wilderness on the west. Sights and sounds that impact solitude include motorboats on Calderwood Lake, vehicles on Highway 129, and from

the private lands at Tapoco; however, only locations immediately adjacent to these areas would be affected. Area trails are not heavily used, so encounters with other visitors is limited.

The area is undeveloped and offers opportunities for primitive and unconfined recreation, such as hunting, fishing, and backcountry recreation. All trails within the area are minimally developed hiking trails and there are no designated motorized or mountain bike trails.

Other Values - Unique or Outstanding Qualities

Area streams are high quality trout waters.

Size & Manageability

At 1,207 acres, the area may not be of sufficient size to practically manage its preservation and use in an unimpaired condition; however, this area is considered an extension to Joyce Kilmer-Slickrock Wilderness. The northeastern boundary follows the shoreline of Tapoca Lake. The eastern boundary is defined primarily by topographic features and follows ridgelines.

Summary

The Joyce Kilmer-Slickrock Wilderness Extension #3, Yellowhammer Branch area is predominately natural appearing with no structures, highly developed trails nor any NF roads. The area has opportunities for solitude, and for primitive and unconfined recreation. At 1,207 acres, the area may not be of sufficient size to practically manage its preservation and use in an unimpaired condition; however, this area would be considered an extension to Joyce Kilmer-Slickrock Wilderness.

Quantitative Summary of Items/Activities within the Joyce Kilmer-Slickrock Wilderness Extension #3 Area

Disclaimer: Information was generated from FS spatial datasets. All figures are approximate.

Description of Area	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Spruce-Fir Ecozone:	acres	0
Northern Hardwood Ecozone:	acres	0
High Elevation Red Oak Ecozone:	acres	0
Acidic Cove Ecozone:	acres	186.0
Rich Cove Ecozone:	acres	21.9
Mesic Oak Ecozone:	acres	618.4
Dry-Mesic Oak Ecozone:	acres	198.7
Dry Oak Ecozone:	acres	8.3
Pine-Oak/Heath Ecozone:	acres	104.2
Shortleaf Pine Ecozone:	acres	69.3
Alluvial Forest Ecozone:	acres	0

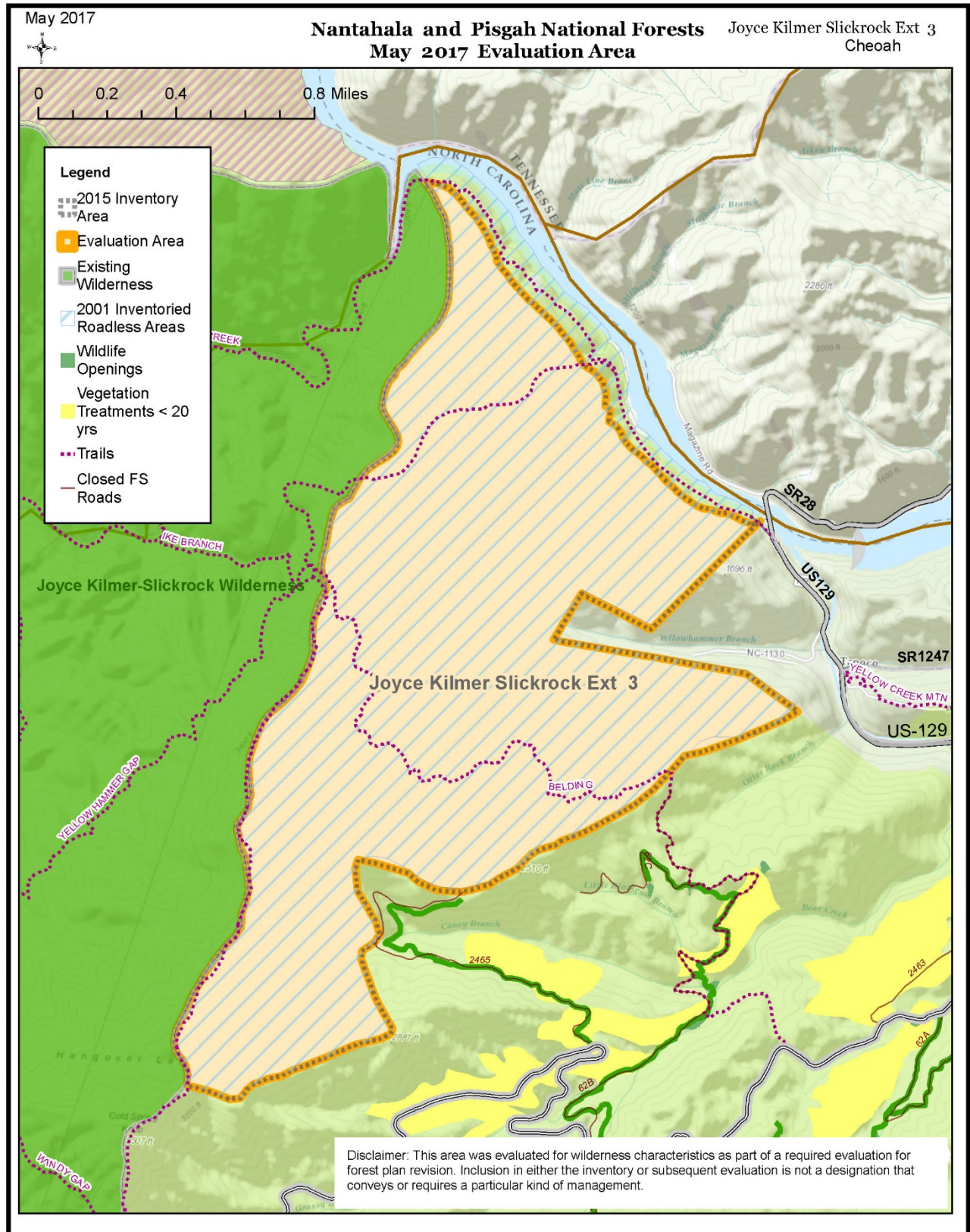
Apparent Naturalness	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Maintenance Level 1 National Forest System Roads:	miles	0
Closed Maintenance Level 2 National Forest System Roads:	miles	0
Road Stream Crossings, Bridge:	number	0
Road Stream Crossings, Other:	number	0
Trail Stream Crossings, Bridge:	number	0
Vegetation Management, 0-20 years old:	acres	0
Vegetation Management, 21-40 years old:	acres	9.4
Maintained Wildlife Fields (may overlap Bald Management Area):	acres	0
Existing Wilderness Study Area (WSA):	acres	0
Existing Inventoried Roadless Area (IRA may overlap WSA):	acres	1,192.3

Solitude or Primitive & Unconfined Recreation	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Current Backcountry Management Area (may overlap WSA & IRA):	acres	1,109.9
Inventoried Primitive Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) Setting:	acres	0

	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Solitude or Primitive & Unconfined Recreation		
Inventoried Semi-Primitive Non-Motorized ROS Setting:	acres	545.9
Inventoried Semi-Primitive Motorized ROS Setting (buffer of adjacent roads):	acres	431.9
Inventoried Roaded Natural ROS Setting (buffer of adjacent roads):	acres	229.5
National Forest System Trail, Hike-only Allowed Use:	miles	3.9
National Forest System Trail, Hike-Bike Allowed Use:	miles	0
National Forest System Trail, Hike-Horse Allowed Use:	miles	0
National Forest System Trail, Hike-Bike-Horse Allowed Use:	miles	0

	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Unique & Outstanding Features		
Current Special Interest Management Area (scenic, geologic, botanical, zoological):	acres	0
Current Designated Wild & Scenic River Corridor (1/4 mile each side):	acres	0
Current Eligible Wild & Scenic River Corridor (1/4 mile each side):	acres	0
Research Natural Area:	acres	0

	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Size & Manageability		
Area, Total:	acres	1207.3
Private/Non-Federal Inholdings, Total:	acres	0
Private/Non-Federal Inholdings, Count:	number	0
Outstanding or Reserved Subsurface Mineral Rights:	acres	0
Current Bald Management Area:	acres	0
Forest Research Plots, Count:	number	0



Name: Joyce Kilmer-Slickrock Wilderness Extension #4

Acres: 326 acres

Description of Area

Location & Access

The Joyce Kilmer-Slickrock Wilderness Extension #4 area is on the Cheoah Ranger District of the Nantahala NF in Graham County, NC. It is adjacent to Joyce Kilmer-Slickrock Wilderness east of Hangover Lead at Sugar Cove Branch. Access to the area is from National Forest System (NFS) Road 62 (Big Fat Gap Road) and NFS Trail 56 (Hangover Lead Trail) from Big Fat Gap Trailhead. There are no other NFS trails or low-maintenance level NFS roads within the area.

Surroundings

The area is completely surrounded by NFS lands with three sides adjoining Joyce Kilmer-Slickrock Wilderness. The northern boundary is along Big Fat Gap Road.

Topography & Vegetation

Much of the area contains steep and rugged terrain, especially approaching the high ridge of Hangover Lead. Slopes become gentler near Sugar Cove Branch. The highest point is 4,320 feet in elevation on Hangover Lead, and the lowest is 2,520 feet along Sugar Cove Branch. The area is covered with dense hardwood forests and the dominant ecozones are rich cove, mesic oak, and dry-mesic oak.

Current Uses

The area is currently managed for backcountry recreation, scenery, and wildlife management. The area has no maintained wildlife fields nor timber harvests within the past 20 years. There are approximately 0.7 miles of hiking trail that crosses the boundary on Hangover Lead. Although the area is remote and isolated, it is a popular bear hunting area.

Evaluation of Wilderness Characteristics

Apparent Naturalness

The area is predominately natural appearing, with no structures, highly developed trails, nor NFS roads. There is evidence of past logging roads that have healed over and blended with the natural landscape. Locust Ridge Trail (TR401) was decommissioned in 2011 but was later used as a dozer line for fire suppression activities and may still be evident on the ground.

Opportunities for Solitude or Primitive & Unconfined Recreation

Trails in the area are not heavily used, so encounters with other visitors would be limited. Impacts to solitude include sights and sounds of vehicles on NFSR62, which terminates at Big Fat Gap Trailhead on the Joyce Kilmer-Slickrock Wilderness boundary; however, this road gets relatively low traffic, since it is remote and not a primary access route to Joyce Kilmer-Slickrock Wilderness.

The area is undeveloped and offers opportunities for primitive and unconfined recreation, such as hiking, hunting, fishing, and backcountry recreation. Hangover Lead Trail is a minimally developed hiking trail and there are no designated motorized or mountain bike trails in the area.

Other Values - Unique or Outstanding Qualities

Area streams are high quality trout waters.

Size & Manageability

At 326 acres, the area may not be of sufficient size to practically manage its preservation and use in an unimpaired condition; however, this area is considered an extension to Joyce Kilmer-Slickrock Wilderness. There are no roads, non-federal inholdings, rights of way, or outstanding subsurface mineral rights within the area.

Summary

Overall, the Joyce Kilmer-Slickrock Extension #4 is predominately natural appearing, with no structures, highly developed trails, or NFS roads. There is evidence of past logging roads that have since healed over and blend with the natural landscape. Trails in the area are not heavily used; the only impacts to solitude would be the sights and sounds of vehicles on NFSR62 which gets relatively little traffic. The area is undeveloped and offers opportunities for primitive and unconfined recreation. The area is relatively small, however, this area would be considered as an extension to Joyce Kilmer-Slickrock Wilderness.

Quantitative Summary of Items/Activities within the Joyce Kilmer-Slickrock Wilderness Extension #4 Area

Disclaimer: Information was generated from FS spatial datasets. All figures are approximate.

Description of Area	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Spruce-Fir Ecozone:	acres	0
Northern Hardwood Ecozone:	acres	12.4
High Elevation Red Oak Ecozone:	acres	8.9
Acidic Cove Ecozone:	acres	32.6
Rich Cove Ecozone:	acres	132.0
Mesic Oak Ecozone:	acres	75.9
Dry-Mesic Oak Ecozone:	acres	56.3
Dry Oak Ecozone:	acres	0.3
Pine-Oak/Heath Ecozone:	acres	7.4
Shortleaf Pine Ecozone:	acres	0.0
Alluvial Forest Ecozone:	acres	0

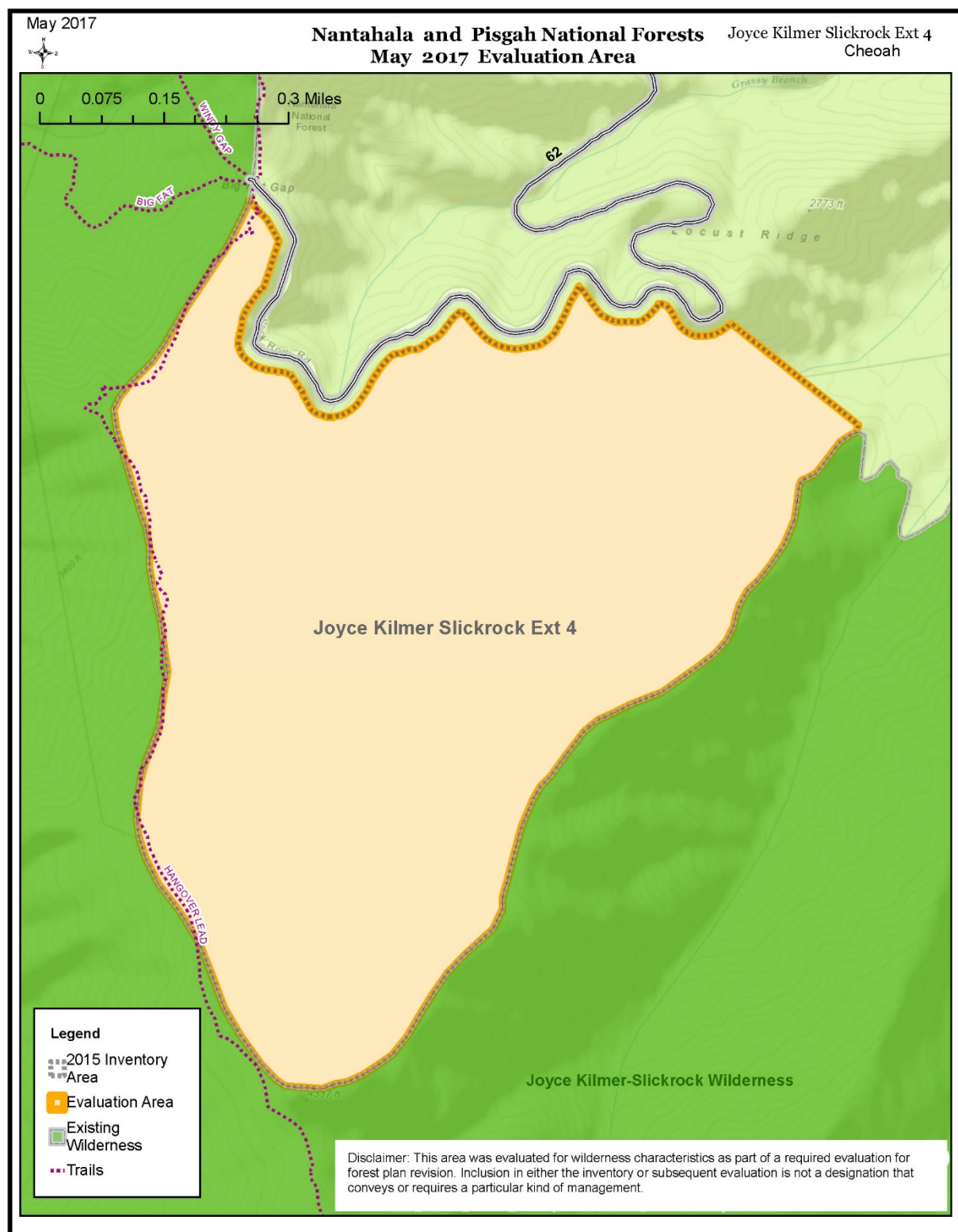
Apparent Naturalness	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Maintenance Level 1 National Forest System Roads:	miles	0
Closed Maintenance Level 2 National Forest System Roads:	miles	0
Road Stream Crossings, Bridge:	number	0
Road Stream Crossings, Other:	number	0
Trail Stream Crossings, Bridge:	number	0
Vegetation Management, 0-20 years old:	acres	0
Vegetation Management, 21-40 years old:	acres	35.0
Maintained Wildlife Fields (may overlap Bald Management Area):	acres	0
Existing Wilderness Study Area (WSA):	acres	0
Existing Inventoried Roadless Area (IRA may overlap WSA):	acres	0

Solitude or Primitive & Unconfined Recreation	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Current Backcountry Management Area (may overlap WSA & IRA):	acres	123.5
Inventoried Primitive Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) Setting:	acres	0

	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Solitude or Primitive & Unconfined Recreation		
Inventoried Semi-Primitive Non-Motorized ROS Setting:	acres	72.1
Inventoried Semi-Primitive Motorized ROS Setting (buffer of adjacent roads):	acres	0
Inventoried Roaded Natural ROS Setting (buffer of adjacent roads):	acres	253.8
National Forest System Trail, Hike-only Allowed Use:	miles	0.7
National Forest System Trail, Hike-Bike Allowed Use:	miles	0
National Forest System Trail, Hike-Horse Allowed Use:	miles	0
National Forest System Trail, Hike-Bike-Horse Allowed Use:	miles	0

	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Unique & Outstanding Features		
Current Special Interest Management Area (scenic, geologic, botanical, zoological):	acres	0
Current Designated Wild & Scenic River Corridor (1/4 mile each side):	acres	0
Current Eligible Wild & Scenic River Corridor (1/4 mile each side):	acres	0
Research Natural Area:	acres	0

	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Size & Manageability		
Area, Total:	acres	325.9
Private/Non-Federal Inholdings, Total:	acres	0
Private/Non-Federal Inholdings, Count:	number	0
Outstanding or Reserved Subsurface Mineral Rights:	acres	0
Current Bald Management Area:	acres	0
Forest Research Plots, Count:	number	0



Name: Santeetlah Headwaters

Acres: 4,448 acres

Description of Area

Location & Access

The Santeetlah Headwaters area is located in Graham County near the North Carolina and Tennessee border on the Cheoah Ranger District of the Nantahala NF. The area lies between the Cherohala Skyway (NC 143/165) to the south and Upper Santeetlah Road (NFSR81) to the north. Access to the area is from four closed maintenance level 2 (ML2) NFS roads: NFSR2564, NFSR2564A, NFSR2804, and NFSR2805; NFSR2564 and NFSR2805 are managed as linear wildlife openings. These closed ML2 roads are open to hike, bike, and horse uses. Huckleberry Knob Trail starts at the Cherohala Skyway and runs north through the area.

Surroundings

The Santeetlah Headwaters area boundaries are irregular and the western portion of the area has a number of “fingers” as a result of the Cherohala Skyway weaving through the mountainous terrain. The northern boundary is adjacent to Santeetlah Creek and follows Upper Santeetlah Road. The area is adjacent to National Forest System lands on all borders. It is located north of Snowbird Wilderness Study area and separated from the area by State Route 143. The Cherokee NF, Sycamore Creek Inventoried Roadless Area is southwest of Santeetlah Headwaters. There are ten concentrated use recreation sites on adjacent lands outside the area.

Topography & Vegetation

The Santeetlah Headwaters area is dominated by a number of the highest peaks in the Unicoi Range including Haw Knob (5,470 feet), Little Huckleberry Knob (5,360 feet), and Huckleberry Knob (5,560 feet). Huckleberry Knob is the tallest in the Unicoi Range as well as the source of Santeetlah Creek. Extending northeast of Huckleberry Knob are Art Stewart and Doc Stewart Ridges, which form the Indian Creek watershed that joins Santeetlah Creek. These high peaks form deep coves and drainage basins that drain into Santeetlah Creek. A broad range of ecozones are represented across the area, including northern hardwood, high elevation red oak, acidic cove, rich cove, and mesic oak.

Current Uses

The area contains a range of dispersed recreation opportunities and forest management activities. Fishing and hunting are popular within and adjacent to the area. The area has several closed maintenance level 2 roads which serve as trails, several maintained wildlife openings, and seven vegetation treatments 21-40 years old. There is limited collection of forest products (ginseng) at lower elevations and extensive collection of ramps occurs in the area. Huckleberry Knob and Little Huckleberry Knob are maintained balds and are popular scenic destinations. Huckleberry Knob is accessible via NFSR 2805 off the Cherohala Skyway and is a popular hiking destination. Much of the area is emphasized as wildlife habitat particularly for black bear and are also popular hunting grounds. The Santeetlah Creek Bluffs is a Special Interest Area on the northwestern border of the area. This area has a large stand of old growth Canadian hemlock (highly impacted by hemlock woolly adelgid) and yellow birch.

The Cherohala Skyway is a National Scenic Byway and is heavily used. As a result, there are several concentrated use sites surrounding the Santeetlah Headwaters area along the skyway; one of which serves as an access point to Huckleberry Knob via NFSR2805.

Evaluation of Wilderness Characteristics

Apparent Naturalness

Most of the Santeetlah Headwaters area has been logged in the past and there are many abandoned roadbeds, as well as several closed maintenance level 2 roads that lead to maintained wildlife openings and past vegetation treatments. Much of the vegetation treatments occurred 21-40 years ago. There are managed wildlife openings within the area as well.

Opportunities for Solitude or Primitive & Unconfined Recreation

While opportunities for solitude may exist deep in the drainage basins of the Santeetlah Creek system, the area is a popular destination for hiking, fishing, and hunting and encountering other forest visitors is a high probability. Sights and sounds of civilization are evident from motorcycles and vehicular traffic along the Cherohala Skyway and there is heavy air traffic from the Knoxville Airport and military flight training overhead. Along the Cherohala Skyway, south of the area boundary, are popular concentrated use sites that might detract from solitude in the immediate vicinity.

There are opportunities for primitive and unconfined recreation in the area with main access points from closed Forest Service roads. Hikers frequent the area, including off trail hiking, and there are hunting and fishing opportunities in the area.

Other Values - Unique or Outstanding Qualities

The mountainous terrain, clear flowing streams, scenic vantage points from high elevation balds, wildlife habitat, and close proximity to the Cherohala Skyway are a scenic attraction for forest visitors. The Santeetlah Headwaters area contains 315 acres of current Special Interest Management Area at Santeetlah Bluffs. A number of plant species of conservation concern exist in the area as well as the federally endangered rock gnome lichen.

Size & Manageability

The Santeetlah Bluffs area is 4,448 acres and is bordered by National Forest System lands and the Cherohala Skyway to the south and west, as well as Santeetlah Creek and NFSR81 to the north. These boundaries, especially those along the skyway, are irregular as they weave around mountains and follow contours. Sights and sounds of civilization are evident from the Cherohala Skyway vehicular traffic as well as air traffic overhead.

Summary

The Santeetlah Headwaters area's small size, irregular boundary and adjacent lands impact the area's ability to be managed as wilderness. The area has many locations that have experienced human modification and management, both past and present. The existence of old logging roads, past vegetation treatments and existing wildlife fields all detract from the naturalness of the area. Impacts to solitude from the Cherohala Skyway, overhead air traffic, and high visitor use also detract from wilderness characteristics throughout much of the area.

Quantitative Summary of Items/Activities within the Santeetlah Headwaters Area

Disclaimer: Information was generated from FS spatial datasets. All figures are approximate.

Description of Area	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Spruce-Fir Ecozone:	acres	152.1
Northern Hardwood Ecozone:	acres	1,817.3
High Elevation Red Oak Ecozone:	acres	42.0
Acidic Cove Ecozone:	acres	925.5
Rich Cove Ecozone:	acres	569.2
Mesic Oak Ecozone:	acres	856.2
Dry-Mesic Oak Ecozone:	acres	11.4
Dry Oak Ecozone:	acres	8.5
Pine-Oak/Heath Ecozone:	acres	39.0
Shortleaf Pine Ecozone:	acres	0.0
Alluvial Forest Ecozone:	acres	0

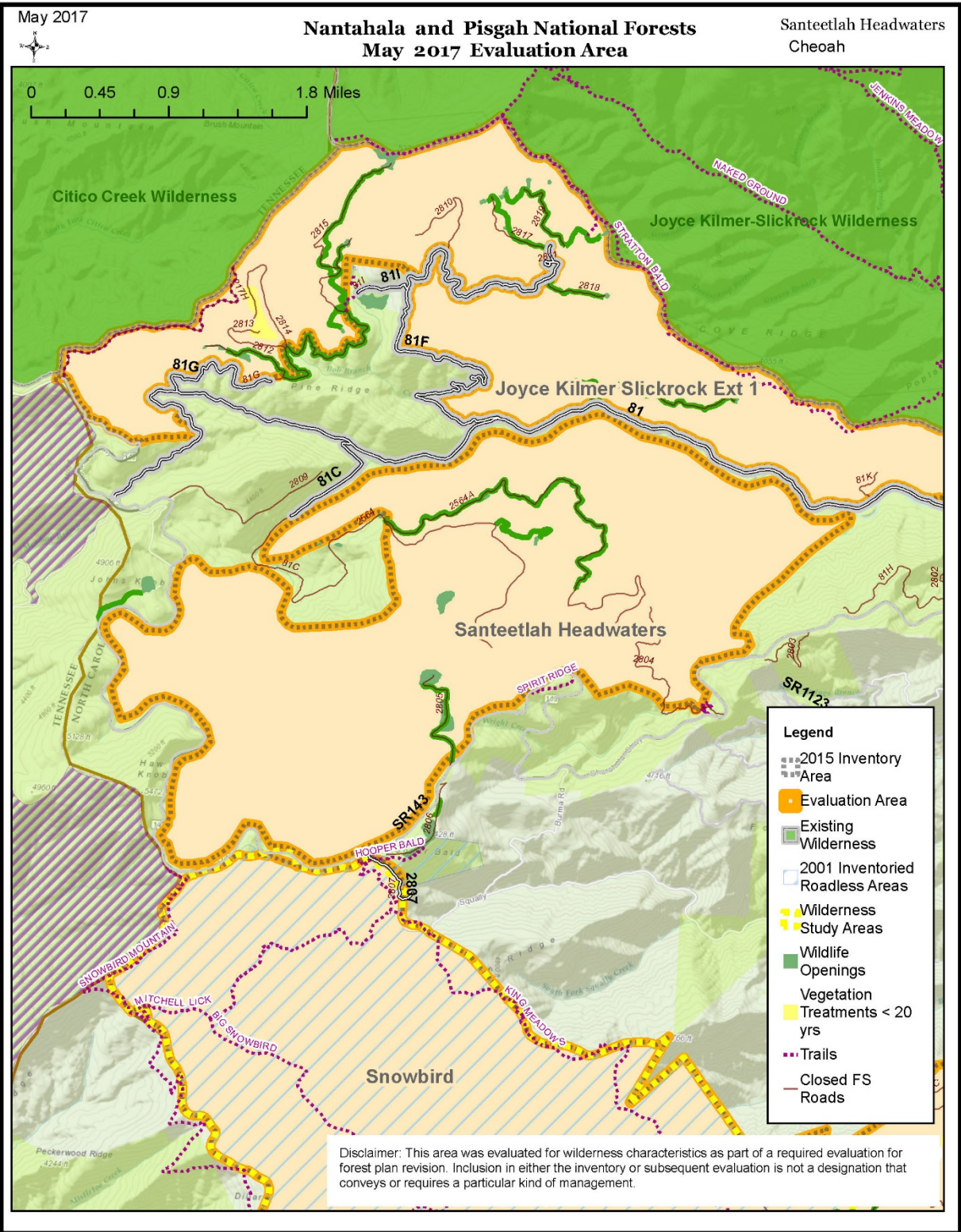
Apparent Naturalness	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Maintenance Level 1 National Forest System Roads:	miles	0
Closed Maintenance Level 2 National Forest System Roads:	miles	7.8
Road Stream Crossings, Bridge:	number	0
Road Stream Crossings, Other:	number	8
Trail Stream Crossings, Bridge:	number	0
Vegetation Management, 0-20 years old:	acres	0
Vegetation Management, 21-40 years old:	acres	258.8
Maintained Wildlife Fields (may overlap Bald Management Area):	acres	30.8
Existing Wilderness Study Area (WSA):	acres	0
Existing Inventoried Roadless Area (IRA may overlap WSA):	acres	0

Solitude or Primitive & Unconfined Recreation	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Current Backcountry Management Area (may overlap WSA & IRA):	acres	0
Inventoried Primitive Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) Setting:	acres	0

	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Solitude or Primitive & Unconfined Recreation		
Inventoried Semi-Primitive Non-Motorized ROS Setting:	acres	29.5
Inventoried Semi-Primitive Motorized ROS Setting (buffer of adjacent roads):	acres	590.2
Inventoried Roaded Natural ROS Setting (buffer of adjacent roads):	acres	1,955.5
National Forest System Trail, Hike-only Allowed Use:	miles	1.3
National Forest System Trail, Hike-Bike Allowed Use:	miles	0
National Forest System Trail, Hike-Horse Allowed Use:	miles	0
National Forest System Trail, Hike-Bike-Horse Allowed Use:	miles	2.0

	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Unique & Outstanding Features		
Current Special Interest Management Area (scenic, geologic, botanical, zoological):	acres	314.7
Current Designated Wild & Scenic River Corridor (1/4 mile each side):	acres	0
Current Eligible Wild & Scenic River Corridor (1/4 mile each side):	acres	0
Research Natural Area:	acres	0

	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Size & Manageability		
Area, Total:	acres	4448.4
Private/Non-Federal Inholdings, Total:	acres	0
Private/Non-Federal Inholdings, Count:	number	0
Outstanding or Reserved Subsurface Mineral Rights:	acres	0
Current Bald Management Area:	acres	0
Forest Research Plots, Count:	number	0



Name: Snowbird

Acres: 11,560 acres

Description of Area

Location & Access

The Snowbird area is on the Cheoah Ranger District of the Nantahala NF in Graham County, NC. It encompasses the entire headwaters of Snowbird Creek. The area is west of SR1115, east of the Graham County line and State line, south of Cherohala Skyway, and west of King Meadows. Access is from several hiking trails in the area and trailheads at Hooper Bald and Big Junction on the Cherohala Skyway, and “The Junction” on National Forest System (NFS) Road 75. In the eastern portion, access is from NFS Road 75 and connecting low-maintenance level NFS roads.

Surroundings

The area is surrounded by private lands on three sides. These surrounding private lands are generally forested with a few scattered residences to the northeast, and residential-pastoral-agricultural uses in the valleys to the east. There are no major housing developments or commercial uses immediately adjacent to area boundaries with the exception of private logging operations.

Topography & Vegetation

Much of the area has steep and rugged terrain, from the high ridge at Big Junction and Hooper Bald, to the headwaters of Snowbird Creek. Stream gradients are also steep with many rock outcrops, large boulders, and waterfalls. The highest point is 5,400 feet in elevation near Hooper Bald, and the lowest is 2,120 feet along Snowbird Creek; a 3,280 foot change in elevation. The area is covered with dense hardwood forests in the uplands and rhododendron and hemlock along stream channels. Most of the hemlocks are dead from infestations of hemlock woolly adelgid. Dominant ecozones include northern hardwood, rich cove, mesic oak, and acidic cove.

Current Uses

The western three-quarters of the area is the Snowbird Wilderness Study Area and is managed to maintain its wilderness characteristics. It has over 27 miles of hiking trails, and there are no timber management activities, wildlife fields, nor NFS roads within the area with one exception on the eastern boundary of the Wilderness Study Area, where NFSR2579 enters the area and leads to a small wildlife field that is maintained through mowing. A portion of NFSR75, which is used as an access road for fire prevention and prescribed burning, also enters the Wilderness Study Area from the east, but is cherry-stemmed out of the area. There are no NFS trails within the WSA boundary designated for motorized or mountain bike use; however, illegal OHV use is occurring on Mitchell Lick Trail (TR154) and King Meadows Trail (TR63) southeast of Hooper Bald and to a lesser degree along the WSA southwestern boundary on Snowbird Mountain Trail (TR415). All three of these trails are designated as hike-only. Access for the OHV trespass is from adjacent private lands, and control of this illegal use is a law enforcement issue.

The eastern quarter of the evaluation area is managed for timber and wildlife on the slopes, and scenery and front-country recreation in the Snowbird Creek corridor. Dispersed camping and fishing are very popular along Snowbird Creek. The eastern portion, outside the WSA, has recent timber management activities, maintained wildlife fields, and over 16 miles of low-maintenance level NFS roads which are

used for hunting access and administratively for prescribed burning. Horseback riding and mountain biking also occurs on closed NFS roads.

Evaluation of Wilderness Characteristics

Apparent Naturalness

The Wilderness Study Area portion of the area is predominately natural appearing, with no highly developed hiking trails or mountain bike trails; and few NFS roads (exceptions previously described). The only structures in this area are trail bridges. There is some evidence of past logging extraction routes have healed over and blend with the natural landscape. Other evidence of past uses in the Wilderness Study Area include an old car and remnants of home sites. In contrast, the eastern portion of the area (outside the Wilderness Study Area) has many miles of NFS roads, maintained wildlife fields, recent timber harvests, and a concrete road bridge.

Opportunities for Solitude or Primitive & Unconfined Recreation

Although much of the area is surrounded by private lands, the western portion of the area encompasses the entire upper Snowbird Creek watershed, extending from ridge to ridge. This topography allows excellent opportunities for solitude, as landforms shield the area from sights and sounds of civilization; even the nearby Cherohala Skyway lies opposite the ridge. To the northeast, there are a few residences adjacent to the area. In the Wilderness Study Area, most of the trails have light use and encounters with other visitors is limited. The OHV trespass on King Meadows, Mitchell Lick, and Snowbird Mountain Trails would detract from solitude when these illegal activities are occurring, though this is not pervasive across the entire WSA. To the east, in the vicinity of NFSR75, sights and sounds of vehicles and dispersed camping are evident, as is the higher concentration of development on adjacent private lands.

The Wilderness Study Area portion of the area is undeveloped and offers opportunities for primitive and unconfined recreation across most of the area, such as hiking, backpacking, hunting, and fishing. There are also opportunities for primitive recreation in the eastern portion of the area, but closed NFS roads allow for equestrian and mountain bike use.

Other Values - Unique or Outstanding Qualities

Area streams are high quality trout waters and have many scenic waterfalls.

Size & Manageability

Western and northeastern area boundaries have no narrow protrusions, although there is one small tract of non-federal land extending inward. Along the northeast and southwest WSA boundaries, the current illegal OHV use affects manageability to preserve or restore wilderness characteristics of naturalness and solitude. However, the core of the WSA exhibits a high degree of naturalness, opportunities for solitude or primitive and unconfined recreation, and undeveloped wilderness characteristics. Conversely, the eastern portion of the area that is outside the designated Wilderness Study Area is narrow, with private lands on either side, and is bisected by the NFSR75 corridor. With several closed NFS roads, wildlife fields and timber treatments, the eastern part of the area does not have wilderness characteristics.

Summary

With the exception of the perimeters affected by illegal OHV use, the Snowbird Wilderness Study Area is predominately natural appearing, undeveloped, and has opportunities for solitude or for primitive and unconfined recreation. The eastern quarter of the area, outside the Wilderness Study Area boundary,

does not have wilderness characteristics because of open roads, recreational developments, and a narrow shape partially surrounded by private lands.

Quantitative Summary of Items/Activities within the Snowbird Area

Disclaimer: Information was generated from FS spatial datasets. All figures are approximate.

Description of Area	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Spruce-Fir Ecozone:	acres	241.8
Northern Hardwood Ecozone:	acres	2,337.6
High Elevation Red Oak Ecozone:	acres	151.3
Acidic Cove Ecozone:	acres	2,627.7
Rich Cove Ecozone:	acres	2,653.1
Mesic Oak Ecozone:	acres	1,847.6
Dry-Mesic Oak Ecozone:	acres	427.4
Dry Oak Ecozone:	acres	145.0
Pine-Oak/Heath Ecozone:	acres	1,093.1
Shortleaf Pine Ecozone:	acres	10.9
Alluvial Forest Ecozone:	acres	0

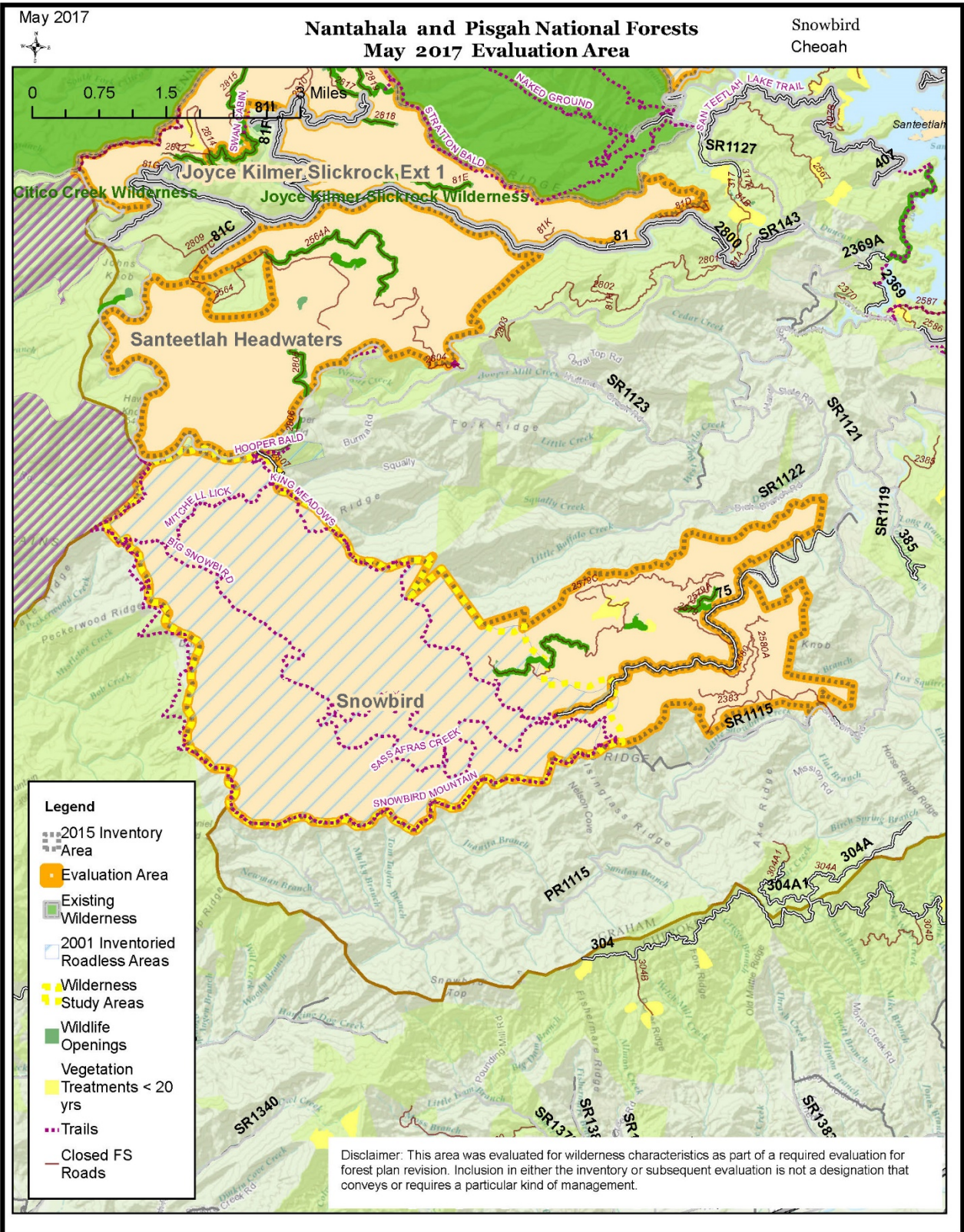
Apparent Naturalness	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Maintenance Level 1 National Forest System Roads:	miles	6.1
Closed Maintenance Level 2 National Forest System Roads:	miles	10.1
Road Stream Crossings, Bridge:	number	1
Road Stream Crossings, Other:	number	23
Trail Stream Crossings, Bridge:	number	7
Vegetation Management, 0-20 years old:	acres	48.7
Vegetation Management, 21-40 years old:	acres	456.5
Maintained Wildlife Fields (may overlap Bald Management Area):	acres	6.8
Existing Wilderness Study Area (WSA):	acres	8,464.7
Existing Inventoried Roadless Area (IRA may overlap WSA):	acres	8,392.7

Solitude or Primitive & Unconfined Recreation	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Current Backcountry Management Area (may overlap WSA & IRA):	acres	8,511.3
Inventoried Primitive Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) Setting:	acres	0
Inventoried Semi-Primitive Non-Motorized ROS Setting:	acres	6,778.9

	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Solitude or Primitive & Unconfined Recreation		
Inventoried Semi-Primitive Motorized ROS Setting (buffer of adjacent roads):	acres	1,363.8
Inventoried Roded Natural ROS Setting (buffer of adjacent roads):	acres	3,413.9
National Forest System Trail, Hike-only Allowed Use:	miles	27.5
National Forest System Trail, Hike-Bike Allowed Use:	miles	0
National Forest System Trail, Hike-Horse Allowed Use:	miles	0
National Forest System Trail, Hike-Bike-Horse Allowed Use:	miles	0

	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Unique & Outstanding Features		
Current Special Interest Management Area (scenic, geologic, botanical, zoological):	acres	0
Current Designated Wild & Scenic River Corridor (1/4 mile each side):	acres	0
Current Eligible Wild & Scenic River Corridor (1/4 mile each side):	acres	3,708.7
Research Natural Area:	acres	0

	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Size & Manageability		
Area, Total:	acres	11,560.2
Private/Non-Federal Inholdings, Total:	acres	0.1
Private/Non-Federal Inholdings, Count:	number	2
Outstanding or Reserved Subsurface Mineral Rights:	acres	0
Current Bald Management Area:	acres	0
Forest Research Plots, Count:	number	6



Name: Yellow Creek Mountains

Acres: 4,445

Description of Area

Location & Access

The Yellow Creek Mountains area is located in the Cheoah District of the Nantahala NF, in Graham County, NC. The area lies south of Fontana Dam, between State Route 28 (SR28), Fontana Village, and SR1246 to the north, and SR1242 (which follows along Yellow Creek) to the south. The western border follows a hydro-electric/power-line easement. The eastern border ends in a protrusion at Firescald Ridge and SR28. Access to the area is from several trails and National Forest System Roads. The Yellow Creek Mountain Creek Trail (NFST48) traverses the area from the west side to its intersection with the Appalachian Trail (AT), which crosses into the area from Yellow Creek Gap on the southern border. A primary access point from Fontana Village is Lookout Rock Trail (NFST40) which leads from Fontana Village up to an intersection with Yellow Creek Mountain Trail at Green Gap.

Surroundings

Area boundaries are very irregular, surrounded by roads, with many small protrusions to the north, east, and south. The western boundary is located just west of Kirkland Gap and runs along the utility transmission corridor where there are overhead powerlines. National forest land continues on the opposite side of the utility line easement. Most of the northern boundary is adjacent to national forest system lands with the exception of the border with Fontana Village, a resort-residential community, and two small sections of non-federal land at Brooks Cove and Bee Cove (residential). The eastern boundary is adjacent to a small buffer of Forest Service land (about 1.2 mile wide) before protruding into non-federal land (residential). The southern boundary borders non-federal land along SR1242 (residential) with the exception of about one mile that borders Forest Service land at Yellow Gap. Adjacent national forest lands to the north, outside the area, include Fontana Dam and Marina and Cable Cove Recreation Area which offers fishing, camping, boating access, and restrooms. The Great Smoky Mountains National Park lies to the north, on the other side of Fontana Lake and the Little Tennessee River below the Dam. The Cheoah Mountains lie to the south.

Topography & Vegetation

The Little Tennessee River carved a deep valley between the Yellow Creek Mountains and the Smokies, now filled by Fontana Lake, which was created by the damming of the river as part of the Tennessee Valley Authority system. The area is formed by part of the Yellow Creek Mountains ridge – a long east-west ridge parallel to the Snowbird and Cheoah mountains to the south and to the spine of the Smokies to the north.

Parts of this area have steep and rugged terrain, with elevations ranging from 2,100 feet near Turpin Branch at the southwest corner of the area, to 3,786 at High Top in the eastern portion near the Appalachian Trail. A range of ecozones are represented in this area, though the area is primarily comprised of a rich cove ecozone. Others ecozones include mesic oak, acidic cove, and dry-mesic-oak.

The area contains rare plant species such as mountain camellia, purple sedge, harbinger-of-spring as well as a unique habitat of high elevation seeps and montane mafic cliffs. Uncharacteristic vegetation exists around the periphery; about 60 acres of white pine dominated vegetation.

Current Uses

The area contains a range of dispersed recreation opportunities and forest management activities. Fishing is very popular in area tributaries. Forest product collecting includes ginseng, black cohosh, and bloodroot. Hunting is also popular and the area has several low maintenance level roads and maintained wildlife openings. Fontana Road (NFSR2624) provides administrative access for trail maintenance, vehicular public access from October 1-30 every year for leaf viewing and is popular for hunting access during this open period. This road also serves as an access road for fire prevention, prescribed burning efforts, and search and rescue.

NFSR2625/A (Bee Cove Road) provides administrative access to the Cable Gap Shelter located on the Appalachian Trail as well as related trail maintenance activities and search and rescue.

There are approximately 19 miles of hiking trails within the area, including the Yellow Creek Mountain Trail (NFST48), and Lookout Rock Trail (NFST40) which connects NFST48 to Fontana Village. The Cable Gap Trail (NFST403) enters the area from the northeast and connects with the Appalachian Trail near Cable Gap Shelter. The Bee Cove Trail (NFST421) runs just inside the northern border of the area for a section and connects with the Appalachian Trail. The Fontana Loop Trail and Bee Cove Trail have recently received Recreational Trails Program Trail Grant funding to convert nine miles of existing hiking trail to hike/bike/equestrian use.

This area contains seven Forest Service research plots.

Evaluation of Wilderness Characteristics

Apparent Naturalness

Although some portions of the area have maintained a natural appearance, much of the area has been logged in the past and there is evidence of old logging roads. About 200 acres were harvested in the late 1980s and some units were included in a timber sale in 2012-2015. Invasive botanical species have been identified in the area.

The eastern portion of the area contains 5.2 miles of low maintenance-level roads maintained for administrative use. This section of the area also contains three acres of maintained wildlife fields. Constructed features include six road stream-crossings and the Cable Gap Shelter along the Appalachian Trail.

The western boundary is along a utility transmission line corridor and there is a very large satellite dish located between Kirkland Gap and Green Gap that is a remnant of communications used during the construction of Fontana Dam. The transmission line and the satellite dish detract from naturalness in the immediate vicinity; however, these impacts are not pervasive across the area.

Opportunities for Solitude or Primitive & Unconfined Recreation

Opportunities for solitude are limited in the area as there are approximately 19 miles of hiking trails where encounters with other forest visitors is a high probability throughout much of the year. The nearby Fontana Village area trailheads and Forest Service roads that run off of SR28 serve as popular access points for hikers, hunters, and fishermen, as do other trail access points around the area's perimeter. Sights and sounds of civilization are evident from locations adjacent to residential property in the north, east, and south and from adjacent roads and developed recreation areas.

Sights and sounds from nearby Fontana Village, Fontana Dam, Santeetlah Power House, as well as boating traffic on the lake and road traffic from this very popular resort area are encountered, particularly on the north-facing slope.

Other - Unique or Outstanding Qualities

The area contains rare plant species such as mountain camellia, purple sedge, and harbinger-of-spring as well as the High Top/Bee Cove Slopes State Natural Heritage Area.

Size & Manageability

The Yellow Creek Mountains configuration has irregular boundaries on the north, east, and south, resulting in many small narrow fingers of private ownership extending into the area. Sights and sounds of civilization are evident in the distance from the ridge line as well as the north and south facing slopes within the area. Signs of development are particularly apparent from certain locations around the periphery; especially along private lands to the north, east, south, and the power-line corridor to the west.

Summary

Existing infrastructure, roads, recent vegetation management and invasive species detract from naturalness of the area. Opportunities for solitude and unconfined recreation are limited in the area given high recreation use, and adjacency to private developed lands. The irregular and narrow configuration of the Yellow Creek Mountains area and its adjacency to developed private lands would make manageability of this area as wilderness difficult.

Quantitative Summary of Items/Activities within the Yellow Creek Mountains Area

Disclaimer: Information was generated from FS spatial datasets. All figures are approximate.

Description of Area	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Spruce-Fir Ecozone:	acres	0
Northern Hardwood Ecozone:	acres	0.4
High Elevation Red Oak Ecozone:	acres	0.0
Acidic Cove Ecozone:	acres	276.8
Rich Cove Ecozone:	acres	2,664.4
Mesic Oak Ecozone:	acres	781.8
Dry-Mesic Oak Ecozone:	acres	225.0
Dry Oak Ecozone:	acres	210.8
Pine-Oak/Heath Ecozone:	acres	274.6
Shortleaf Pine Ecozone:	acres	4.2
Alluvial Forest Ecozone:	acres	0

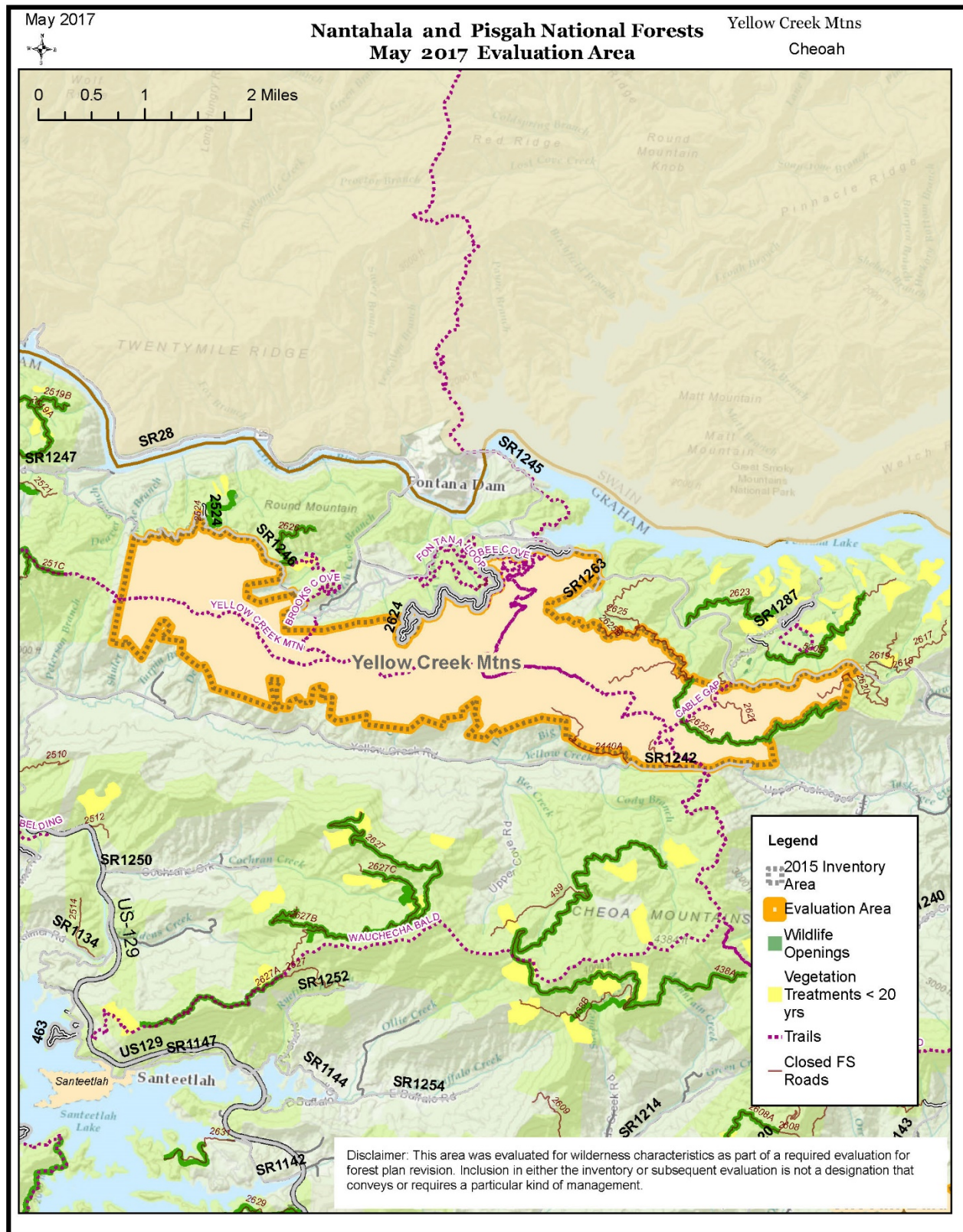
Apparent Naturalness	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Maintenance Level 1 National Forest System Roads:	miles	1.9
Closed Maintenance Level 2 National Forest System Roads:	miles	3.3
Road Stream Crossings, Bridge:	number	0
Road Stream Crossings, Other:	number	6
Trail Stream Crossings, Bridge:	number	0
Vegetation Management, 0-20 years old:	acres	0
Vegetation Management, 21-40 years old:	acres	423.4
Maintained Wildlife Fields (may overlap Bald Management Area):	acres	3.0
Existing Wilderness Study Area (WSA):	acres	0
Existing Inventoried Roadless Area (IRA may overlap WSA):	acres	0

Solitude or Primitive & Unconfined Recreation	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Current Backcountry Management Area (may overlap WSA & IRA):	acres	0
Inventoried Primitive Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) Setting:	acres	0

	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Solitude or Primitive & Unconfined Recreation		
Inventoried Semi-Primitive Non-Motorized ROS Setting:	acres	648.4
Inventoried Semi-Primitive Motorized ROS Setting (buffer of adjacent roads):	acres	530.1
Inventoried Roaded Natural ROS Setting (buffer of adjacent roads):	acres	3,263.8
National Forest System Trail, Hike-only Allowed Use:	miles	18.7
National Forest System Trail, Hike-Bike Allowed Use:	miles	0
National Forest System Trail, Hike-Horse Allowed Use:	miles	0
National Forest System Trail, Hike-Bike-Horse Allowed Use:	miles	0

	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Unique & Outstanding Features		
Current Special Interest Management Area (scenic, geologic, botanical, zoological):	acres	0
Current Designated Wild & Scenic River Corridor (1/4 mile each side):	acres	0
Current Eligible Wild & Scenic River Corridor (1/4 mile each side):	acres	0
Research Natural Area:	acres	0

	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Size & Manageability		
Area, Total:	acres	4,444.5
Private/Non-Federal Inholdings, Total:	acres	0
Private/Non-Federal Inholdings, Count:	number	0
Outstanding or Reserved Subsurface Mineral Rights:	acres	0
Current Bald Management Area:	acres	0
Forest Research Plots, Count:	number	7



Grandfather Ranger District

Name: Dobson Knob Extension

Acres: 11,763 acres

Description of Area

Location & Access

The Dobson Knob Extension area, located in McDowell and Burke Counties, lies between NC1238/Kistler Memorial Highway and the Linville Gorge Wilderness to the east and US221 and NC1560 to the west. Dobson Knob Road (NFSR106) branches off from NC1238 and splits the southern end of the area and is the boundary of McDowell and Burke Counties. Access into the area is from the Overmountain Victory Trail trailhead at NC1560 in the south.

Surroundings

The entire western boundary and a portion of the southern boundary is adjacent to National Forest System lands. The eastern portion is separated from the Linville Gorge Wilderness by State Road NC1238. The western boundary and southeast corner are adjacent to private land. North Cove community is southwest of the area and the community of Linville Falls is to the north of the area. Private property, homes, and development are visible along US-221. Private homes and roads are adjacent to the area along this boundary.

Topography & Vegetation

Dobson Knob is a rugged area that is dominated by the western rim of the Linville Gorge. It drops substantially in elevation down towards US221. The southern portion of the area is comprised of Dobson Knob and Bald Knob and ridges, such as Pond Ridge, that extend from these peaks. Elevations range from 3,745 feet to the west of Laurel Knob down to 1,530 feet in the southeast corner of the area in the Paddy Creek drainage area.

Ecozones in the area include acidic cove, mesic oak, dry-mesic oak, dry oak, and pine-oak/heath. The predominant forest cover type is acidic cove. Approximately 1,000 acres of the area are dominated by white pine.

Current Uses

The Dobson Knob area contains dispersed recreation and hunting opportunities as well as forest management activities. The Over Mountain Victory National Historic Trail transects the area in the south and joins the Mountains to Sea Trail via NC1238 as it exits the area. Bear hunting is popular in the area. There are approximately 65 acres that have been managed for timber within the last 20 years, and approximately 149 acres that have been managed between 21-40 years ago. Along the Over Mountain Victory Trail there are two maintained wildlife openings, and two more along Dobson Knob Road. The area also has extensive use by special use permittees, often in large groups. The southern half of the area contains approximately 6,000 acres of the Dobson Knob Inventoried Roadless Area.

Evaluation of Wilderness Characteristics

Apparent Naturalness

The Dobson Knob area has rugged and steep terrain, especially in the northern portion that is adjacent to the Linville Gorge. Because of the steep terrain, the area has had relatively little logging, with some

exceptions. The northern tip of the area has two stands that were managed for timber production 21-40 years ago; however, these are not likely to be noticeable to the average forest visitor nor detract from naturalness of the area.

To the south, there are several vegetation management areas, two of which have occurred within the last 20 years, and approximately seven acres of maintained wildlife openings along Dobson Road. Dobson Road is within the Inventoried Roadless Area but excluded from the area as part of this inventory and evaluation for wilderness. There is a non-federal inholding with a communications tower along the road and a cleared utility corridor that runs from the tower through the area to the adjacent northwest private land near NC1560.

The 2007 Dobson Knob Fire occurred in the southeast corner of the area. This fire required several roads to be built and wildland firefighting activities, such as dozer lines, are evident.

Opportunities for Solitude or Primitive & Unconfined Recreation

Sights and sounds from adjacent areas are noticeable in many parts of the Dobson Knob area. US221 and an active railroad are just to the west of the area and the North Cove community lies immediately to the southwest. Private roads and homes are also directly adjacent to the western boundary of the area. NC1238 separates the area from the Linville Gorge Wilderness, a road frequented by visitors to the area on the western rim of the gorge. Dobson Road branches off from NC1238 deep into the southern area.

There are some existing opportunities for primitive and unconfined recreation in the area, including the Over Mountain Trail, which the Mountains to Sea Trail joins. Bear hunting is also popular in the area.

Other Values - Unique or Outstanding Qualities

The high and rugged terrain of the area provides views east into the Linville Gorge from NC1238. Unique habitats and rare plants are present. Fire has played part in the area's history and provides a unique perspective into forest regeneration following disturbance events. The Over Mountain Victory Trail, a National Historic Trail, transverses the area. There is one State Natural Heritage Area within the Dobson Knob Area.

Size & Manageability

Approximately half of Dobson Knob's 11,763 acres are in the Dobson Knob Inventoried Roadless Area. The northern two thirds of the area is long and slender with a protrusion at the northern end. NC1238, which separates the area from the Linville Gorge Wilderness, is the primary point of access for visitors on the western rim of the gorge. Aside from a small portion of the southwestern tip, the entire western boundary of the area is adjacent to private property, and in some cases, private homes and roads abut proposed area boundaries. There is a non-federal inholding that is bisected by NFSR106 in the middle of the area which is where the communication tower is located. Near this inholding is a small tract of private land. There are approximately 1,658 acres of outstanding or reserved subsurface mineral rights in the area.

Summary

Although the area is adjacent to an existing wilderness and there is a 5,955 acre Inventoried Roadless Area, management for wilderness characteristics would be difficult in the Dobson Knob Extension B area due to the extensive border it shares with private property. Sights and sounds of civilization, including US221, an active railroad, and NC1238 have the potential to affect the naturalness and solitude of the area. NC1238, which separates the area from the Linville Gorge Wilderness, is the primary point of access for visitors on the western rim. Dobson Knob Road splits from NC1238 and leads to a private tract

where a communications tower exists, and there is a power line corridor that bisects the area just north of the Inventoried Roadless Area.

Quantitative Summary of Items/Activities within the Dobson Knob Extension B Area

Disclaimer: Information was generated from FS spatial datasets. All figures are approximate.

Description of Area	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Spruce-Fir Ecozone:	acres	0
Northern Hardwood Ecozone:	acres	0
High Elevation Red Oak Ecozone:	acres	1.4
Acidic Cove Ecozone:	acres	4,710.1
Rich Cove Ecozone:	acres	4.4
Mesic Oak Ecozone:	acres	627.6
Dry-Mesic Oak Ecozone:	acres	1,929.0
Dry Oak Ecozone:	acres	1,204.0
Pine-Oak/Heath Ecozone:	acres	3,277.7
Shortleaf Pine Ecozone:	acres	0.2
Alluvial Forest Ecozone:	acres	0.6

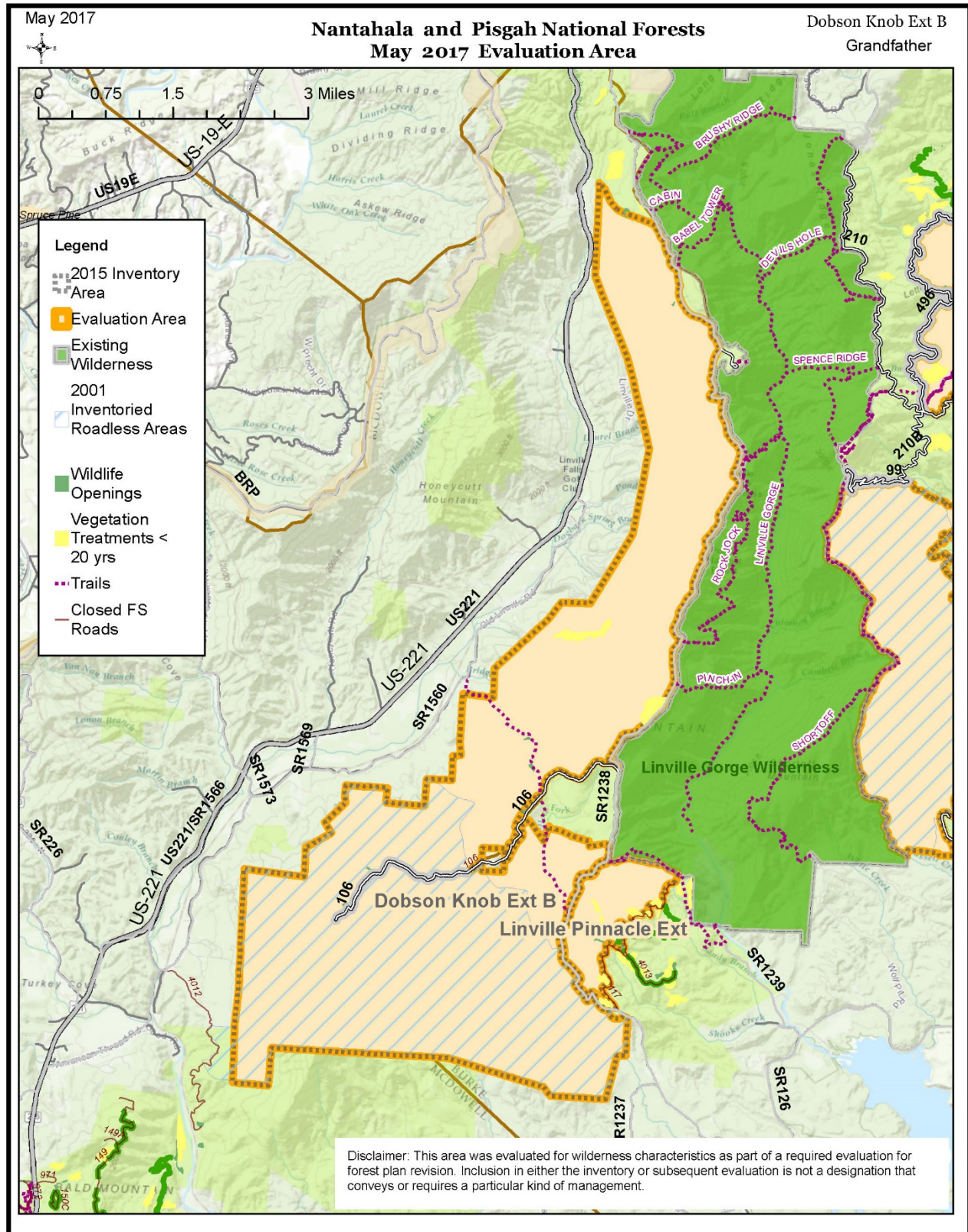
Apparent Naturalness	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Maintenance Level 1 National Forest System Roads:	miles	0
Closed Maintenance Level 2 National Forest System Roads:	miles	0
Road Stream Crossings, Bridge:	number	0
Road Stream Crossings, Other:	number	0
Trail Stream Crossings, Bridge:	number	0
Vegetation Management, 0-20 years old:	acres	64.5
Vegetation Management, 21-40 years old:	acres	148.8
Maintained Wildlife Fields (may overlap Bald Management Area):	acres	5.7
Existing Wilderness Study Area (WSA):	acres	0
Existing Inventoried Roadless Area (IRA may overlap WSA):	acres	5,955.6

Solitude or Primitive & Unconfined Recreation	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Current Backcountry Management Area (may overlap WSA & IRA):	acres	0
Inventoried Primitive Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) Setting:	acres	0

	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Solitude or Primitive & Unconfined Recreation		
Inventoried Semi-Primitive Non-Motorized ROS Setting:	acres	5,575.2
Inventoried Semi-Primitive Motorized ROS Setting (buffer of adjacent roads):	acres	2,389.2
Inventoried Roaded Natural ROS Setting (buffer of adjacent roads):	acres	3,798.0
National Forest System Trail, Hike-only Allowed Use:	miles	2.5
National Forest System Trail, Hike-Bike Allowed Use:	miles	0
National Forest System Trail, Hike-Horse Allowed Use:	miles	0
National Forest System Trail, Hike-Bike-Horse Allowed Use:	miles	0

	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Unique & Outstanding Features		
Current Special Interest Management Area (scenic, geologic, botanical, zoological):	acres	0
Current Designated Wild & Scenic River Corridor (1/4 mile each side):	acres	0
Current Eligible Wild & Scenic River Corridor (1/4 mile each side):	acres	0
Research Natural Area:	acres	0

	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Size & Manageability		
Area, Total:	acres	11,763.2
Private/Non-Federal Inholdings, Total:	acres	41.8
Private/Non-Federal Inholdings, Count:	number	1
Outstanding or Reserved Subsurface Mineral Rights:	acres	1,658.2
Current Bald Management Area:	acres	0
Forest Research Plots, Count:	number	0



Name: Harper Creek

Acres: 7,457 acres

Description of Area

Location & Access

The Harper Creek area is on the Grandfather Ranger District of the Pisgah NF in Avery, Burke, and Caldwell Counties, NC. The area is currently a designated Wilderness Study Area. It lies west of Wilson Creek Wild and Scenic River, north of National Forest System (NFS) Roads 982 and 198, east of NFS Road 58, and south of NFS Road 464 and Lost Cove Wilderness Study Area. Access is from several hiking trails in the area and trailheads on SR1328, and the previously named NFS roads.

Surroundings

The area is predominately surrounded by Pisgah NFS lands, but there are two relatively small private tracts on the west side at Kawana on Harper Creek and northwest near North Harper Creek headwaters. The Kawana community is comprised mainly of nursery and Christmas tree farms, while the North Harper Creek tract is primarily wooded with one residence. To the east are private and state-owned lands in the Wilson Creek corridor, which are mostly forested with a few farms in the narrow Wilson Creek valley. Wilson Creek Wild and Scenic River corridor is to the east and Lost Cove Wilderness Study Area is to the north. Most of the northern, western, and southern perimeter is bounded by open NFS roads.

Topography & Vegetation

Much of the area has steep and rugged terrain, with large rock outcrops and cliffs. Stream gradients are also steep in places with many rock faces, large boulders, and numerous waterfalls. The highest point is 3,400 feet in elevation at Little Lost Cove Cliffs, and the lowest is 1,440 feet along Wilson Creek; a 1,960 foot change in elevation. The area is covered with dense hardwood and pine forests in the uplands, and rhododendron and hemlock along stream channels. Many of the hemlocks are dead from infestations of the hemlock woolly adelgid. Dominant ecozones in the area include acidic cove, pine-oak heath, and dry-mesic oak.

Current Uses

Most of this area was designated by Congress as a Wilderness Study Area in 1984. The Wilderness Study Area was recommended for wilderness designation in the 1987 Nantahala and Pisgah NFs Land and Resource Management Plan, and has been managed to maintain wilderness characteristics since that time. The area was also designated as an Inventoried Roadless Area in 2001. As a Wilderness Study Area and Inventoried Roadless Area, almost the entire area is managed for remote backcountry recreation, with the exception of about 230 acres on the southwest border which is managed for timber and wildlife habitat improvement. There are no NFS roads or recent timber management activities in the area; however, there are two maintained wildlife fields in the south with another two along the northern boundary, totaling 5.7 acres.

The area contains approximately 35 miles of NFS trails designated as hike-only, some of which receive unauthorized mountain bike use. The area is used by hunters, hikers, backpackers, and rock climbers. Area streams are popular for swimming, water play, backcountry angling for trout, and kayaking by skilled creek boaters during high water levels. The area also has extensive use by special use permittees, often in large groups.

Evaluation of Wilderness Characteristics

Apparent Naturalness

The majority of the area has been managed to preserve wilderness characteristics since the 1980's; therefore, the area is predominately natural appearing and has no structures, highly developed hiking trails, mountain bike trails, or NFS roads. The exception are four maintained wildlife fields and their access routes. Unauthorized mountain bike use has degraded some trails in the area. There is some evidence of historic logging roads but these have primarily healed-over and blend with the natural appearing landscape.

Opportunities for Solitude or Primitive & Unconfined Recreation

Although area boundaries are adjacent to private lands and roads where sights or sounds of equipment or vehicles may be experienced, the core of the area is predominately a remote backcountry with many opportunities for solitude. In most locations, topography enhances opportunities for solitude, as landforms shield the area from sights and sounds of civilization; even the nearby Brown Mountain Beach Road lies opposite the main ridges. The Blue Ride Parkway is about two miles to the northwest, but it is mostly shielded by topography. Area trails are not heavily used, except those accessing streams, waterfalls, and swimming holes. Encounters with other visitors would be a higher possibility at these locations during peak use seasons, but the area offers many trail and backpacking opportunities where visitor encounters are a low probability.

Most of the area is undeveloped and offers opportunities for primitive and unconfined recreation, such as hiking, backpacking, water play, hunting, fishing, rock climbing, and creek kayaking. There is unauthorized mountain bike use in the area but increased visitor education and enforcement has controlled some of this use.

Other Values - Unique or Outstanding Qualities

The area has outstanding geologic features and scenic beauty. There are many waterfalls including Harper Creek Falls, North Harper Creek Falls, South Harper Creek Falls, and Bard Falls. At Little Lost Cove Cliffs, there are exposed rock ridge-tops and sheer rock faces, and there are many smaller rock outcrops and boulder strewn streams throughout the area. Some of the area's forests have old growth characteristics, many streams are high quality trout waters, and a portion of the area overlaps Wilson Creek Wild and Scenic River corridor. There are four State Natural Heritage Areas wholly or partially within the Harper Creek Wilderness Study Area.

Size & Manageability

Area boundaries primarily follow open roads and Forest Service ownership boundaries. This area is currently managed as a Wilderness Study Area, and as such is managed to preserve wilderness characteristics.

Summary

Overall, the Harper Creek area is predominately natural appearing, has opportunities for solitude, and for primitive and unconfined recreation. As an Inventoried Roadless Area and congressionally designated Wilderness Study Area, Harper Creek has been managed to preserve wilderness characteristics for many years and was recommended for wilderness designation in the 1987 Nantahala and Pisgah NF Land and Resource Management Plan. There is a small area on the southwest side that was included in the inventory and evaluation but is not in the designated Wilderness Study Area. Due to the topography this area is separated from the rest of the Wilderness Study Area.

Quantitative Summary of Items/Activities within the Harper Creek Area

Disclaimer: Information was generated from FS spatial datasets. All figures are approximate.

Description of Area	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Spruce-Fir Ecozone:	acres	0
Northern Hardwood Ecozone:	acres	0
High Elevation Red Oak Ecozone:	acres	0
Acidic Cove Ecozone:	acres	2,866.5
Rich Cove Ecozone:	acres	513.1
Mesic Oak Ecozone:	acres	535.5
Dry-Mesic Oak Ecozone:	acres	1,290.0
Dry Oak Ecozone:	acres	970.9
Pine-Oak/Heath Ecozone:	acres	1,162.8
Shortleaf Pine Ecozone:	acres	62.5
Alluvial Forest Ecozone:	acres	55.5

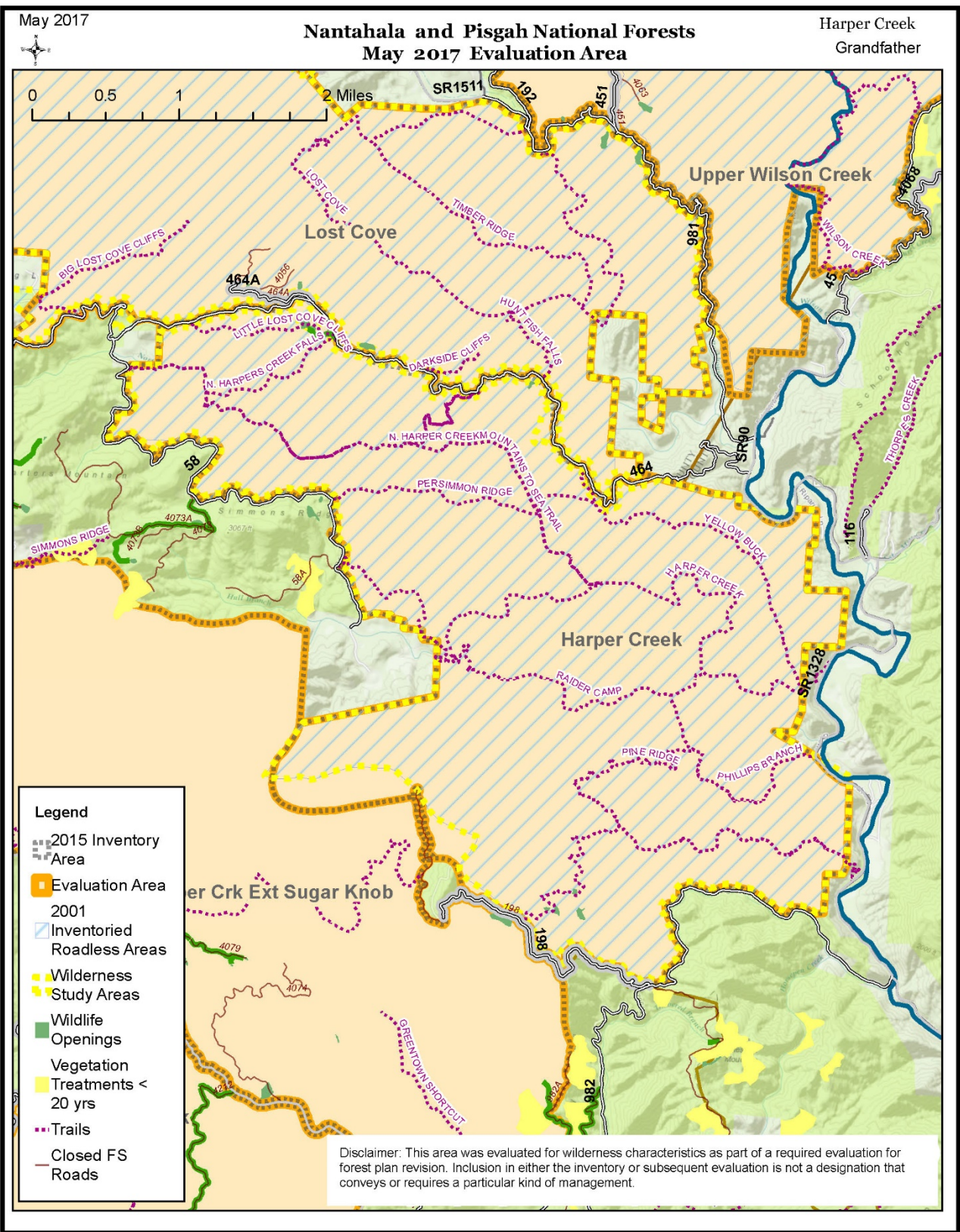
Apparent Naturalness	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Maintenance Level 1 National Forest System Roads:	miles	0
Closed Maintenance Level 2 National Forest System Roads:	miles	0
Road Stream Crossings, Bridge:	number	0
Road Stream Crossings, Other:	number	0
Trail Stream Crossings, Bridge:	number	0
Vegetation Management, 0-20 years old:	acres	0
Vegetation Management, 21-40 years old:	acres	299.6
Maintained Wildlife Fields (may overlap Bald Management Area):	acres	5.7
Existing Wilderness Study Area (WSA):	acres	6,999.8
Existing Inventoried Roadless Area (IRA may overlap WSA):	acres	7,226.0

Solitude or Primitive & Unconfined Recreation	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Current Backcountry Management Area (may overlap WSA & IRA):	acres	0
Inventoried Primitive Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) Setting:	acres	0
Inventoried Semi-Primitive Non-Motorized ROS Setting:	acres	2,798.1

	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Solitude or Primitive & Unconfined Recreation		
Inventoried Semi-Primitive Motorized ROS Setting (buffer of adjacent roads):	acres	0
Inventoried Roded Natural ROS Setting (buffer of adjacent roads):	acres	4,634.0
National Forest System Trail, Hike-only Allowed Use:	miles	34.8
National Forest System Trail, Hike-Bike Allowed Use:	miles	0
National Forest System Trail, Hike-Horse Allowed Use:	miles	0
National Forest System Trail, Hike-Bike-Horse Allowed Use:	miles	0

	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Unique & Outstanding Features		
Current Special Interest Management Area (scenic, geologic, botanical, zoological):	acres	0
Current Designated Wild & Scenic River Corridor (1/4 mile each side):	acres	331.7
Current Eligible Wild & Scenic River Corridor (1/4 mile each side):	acres	0
Research Natural Area:	acres	0

	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Size & Manageability		
Area, Total:	acres	7,456.9
Private/Non-Federal Inholdings, Total:	acres	0
Private/Non-Federal Inholdings, Count:	number	0
Outstanding or Reserved Subsurface Mineral Rights:	acres	0
Current Bald Management Area:	acres	0
Forest Research Plots, Count:	number	0



Name: Harper Creek Extension (Sugar Knob)

Acres: 6,175 acres

Description of Area

Location & Access

The Harper Creek Extension area (aka: Sugar Knob) is on the Grandfather Ranger District of the Pisgah NF in Avery and Burke Counties, NC. The area lies west of Harper Creek Wilderness Study Area and National Forest System (NFS) Roads 982 and 198, northeast of State Road (SR) 181, and south of Hull Branch. Access is from several trails and closed NFS roads, with trailheads off SR181, NFS roads 197 and 198.

Surroundings

The Harper Creek Extension area is predominately surrounded by Pisgah NFS lands, with exceptions of private lands to the northeast at Kawana, to the north at Headquarters Mountain, and to the northwest at Parks Mountain. The Kawana and Headquarters Mountain tracts have nursery farms, while the Parks Mountain tract has a housing development. In each case there are planted fields, farm buildings, or residences immediately adjacent to area boundaries. To the north and east are heavily managed national forest lands around Simmons Ridge and Old Way Ridge. To the east and south are several segments of open NFS roads and a small piece of land connecting the area to Harper Creek Wilderness Study Area. This unroaded connection is approximately 0.6 miles wide and lies between private lands at Kawana and NFSR198. State Route 181 runs along the western boundary, following the ridge between Steels Creek and Upper Creek drainages. There is a roadside turnout and parking area along SR181 called "Brown Mountain Overlook", and a large parking lot at Upper Creek Falls trailhead.

Topography & Vegetation

Much of the area has steep and rugged terrain, especially in the Upper Creek drainage where there are rock faces, large boulders, and waterfalls. The highest point is 4,050 feet in elevation at Parks Mountain, and the lowest is 1,320 feet along Upper Creek; a 2,730 foot change in elevation. The area is covered with pine and hardwood forests in the uplands, and rhododendron and hemlock along stream channels. Many of the hemlocks are dead from infestations of the non-native invasive hemlock woolly adelgid. Dominant ecozones in the area include acidic cove, pine-oak heath, and dry-mesic oak.

Current Uses

Much of the area is currently managed for timber and wildlife habitat improvement. The area has several maintained wildlife fields, and low maintenance level NFS roads mowed as linear wildlife openings. There have also been timber harvests on hundreds of acres within the area in the last 40 years. On the steep slopes around Sugar Knob, Upper Creek, and its tributaries, the management emphasis is on maintaining scenery and mature forest habitat. The area also has approximately six miles of NFS trails, over half of which are managed for mountain biking. Trails in the area include the Greentown Trail (aka: Mountains-to-Sea National Recreation Trail), Greentown Shortcut, and the very popular Upper Creek Falls Trail. Parts of the area are remote and offer a backcountry experience, especially in the Upper Creek "gorge". The area is also used for hunting, backcountry angling for trout, and kayaking by skilled creek boaters during high water levels. The area also has extensive use by special use permittees, often in large groups.

Evaluation of Wilderness Characteristics

Apparent Naturalness

With its past timber harvests, maintained wildlife fields, linear wildlife openings, and NFS roads, much of the area has a managed or modified appearance. This is especially true to the north, west, and southeast. The Upper Creek Falls Trail has many constructed features that detract from naturalness along the trail; however, the steep slopes of Upper Creek “gorge” in the central portion of the area is predominately natural appearing.

Opportunities for Solitude or Primitive & Unconfined Recreation

The Harper Creek Extension area has opportunities for solitude, but this is primarily in the steep slopes of Upper Creek “gorge”. Adjacent private lands and roads around the area’s perimeter impact solitude at those locations with sights of sounds of equipment, vehicles, or structures. The sights and sounds of trucks and tractors can also be heard during maintenance of area wildlife fields. Area trails are not heavily used, except Upper Creek Falls Trail which has a large trailhead parking area on SR181. Encounters with other visitors would be a higher possibility at this location during peak use seasons, but other locations offer hiking and backpacking opportunities where visitor encounters are a lower probability.

Much of the area offers opportunities for primitive and unconfined recreation, such as hiking, backpacking, swimming, hunting, fishing, and creek kayaking. The steep gorge-like sections of Upper Creek (below Upper Creek Falls) are particularly remote and well suited for primitive recreation; however, the area has NFS trails and closed roads used for mountain biking, which is not considered a primitive type of recreation. One of the mountain bike trails is Greentown Trail, which bisects the area from east to west. Users along this central section of Upper Creek may encounter mountain bikers at Greentown Trail, which tends to confine those seeking a primitive recreation experience to areas north or south of the trail.

Other Values - Unique or Outstanding Qualities

The area has many scenic waterfalls, rock outcrops, and boulder-strewn streams, particularly in the gorge segments of Upper Creek. Some of the area’s forests have old growth characteristics; however, the area overall is typical for the eastern slopes of the Southern Appalachian Mountains.

Size & Manageability

At 6,175 acres, this area could be considered as a stand-alone area; however, there is a narrow strip of land that connects the area to Harper Creek Wilderness Study Area, which could make this area an extension to the existing Wilderness Study Area. Much of the boundary is adjacent to National Forest lands, but some boundaries border private lands.

Summary

The Harper Creek Extension area has apparent naturalness and opportunities for solitude in much of its core area along the steep slopes of Upper Creek drainage; however, adverse impacts to wilderness characteristics are common beyond this core area. Extensive past and current timber and wildlife management affect the area’s natural appearance in many locations to the north, west, and southeast, as does the highly developed trail at Upper Creek Falls. Opportunities for solitude, and primitive and unconfined recreation exist in parts of the Upper Creek drainage, but sights and sounds of the adjacent highway and likely encounters with waterfall visitors, and large outfitter and guide groups detract from solitude.

Quantitative Summary of Items/Activities within the Harper Creek Extension (Sugar Knob) Area

Disclaimer: Information was generated from FS spatial datasets. All figures are approximate.

Description of Area	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Spruce-Fir Ecozone:	acres	0
Northern Hardwood Ecozone:	acres	0
High Elevation Red Oak Ecozone:	acres	0
Acidic Cove Ecozone:	acres	2,732.1
Rich Cove Ecozone:	acres	340.5
Mesic Oak Ecozone:	acres	258.7
Dry-Mesic Oak Ecozone:	acres	872.5
Dry Oak Ecozone:	acres	701.8
Pine-Oak/Heath Ecozone:	acres	1,184.2
Shortleaf Pine Ecozone:	acres	64.4
Alluvial Forest Ecozone:	acres	37.2

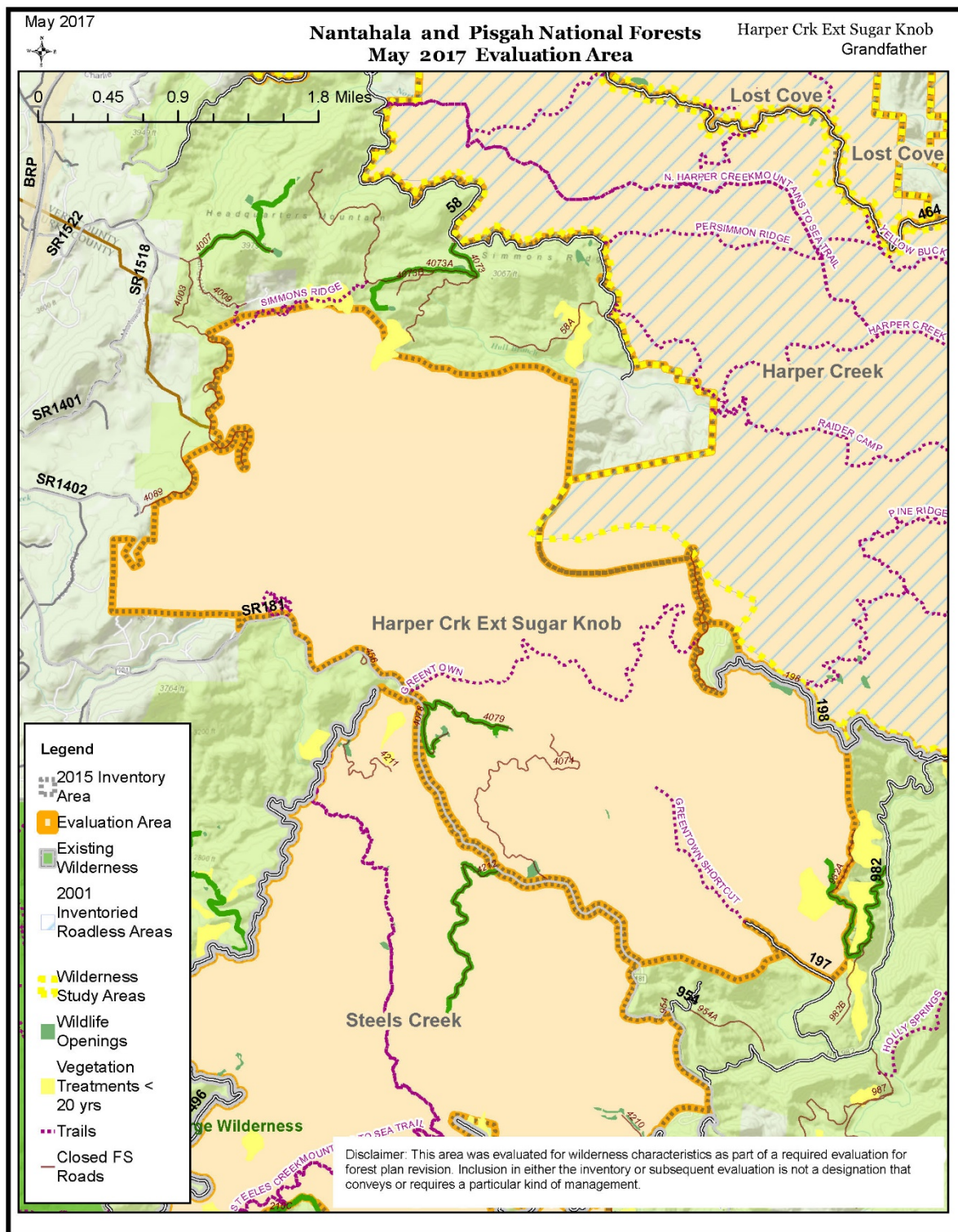
Apparent Naturalness	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Maintenance Level 1 National Forest System Roads:	miles	0
Closed Maintenance Level 2 National Forest System Roads:	miles	1.1
Road Stream Crossings, Bridge:	number	0
Road Stream Crossings, Other:	number	1
Trail Stream Crossings, Bridge:	number	0
Vegetation Management, 0-20 years old:	acres	45.2
Vegetation Management, 21-40 years old:	acres	474.7
Maintained Wildlife Fields (may overlap Bald Management Area):	acres	9.1
Existing Wilderness Study Area (WSA):	acres	4.3
Existing Inventoried Roadless Area (IRA may overlap WSA):	acres	4.6

Solitude or Primitive & Unconfined Recreation	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Current Backcountry Management Area (may overlap WSA & IRA):	acres	0
Inventoried Primitive Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) Setting:	acres	0

	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Solitude or Primitive & Unconfined Recreation		
Inventoried Semi-Primitive Non-Motorized ROS Setting:	acres	1,623.0
Inventoried Semi-Primitive Motorized ROS Setting (buffer of adjacent roads):	acres	1,240.4
Inventoried Roaded Natural ROS Setting (buffer of adjacent roads):	acres	3,310.0
National Forest System Trail, Hike-only Allowed Use:	miles	2.4
National Forest System Trail, Hike-Bike Allowed Use:	miles	3.4
National Forest System Trail, Hike-Horse Allowed Use:	miles	0
National Forest System Trail, Hike-Bike-Horse Allowed Use:	miles	0

	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Unique & Outstanding Features		
Current Special Interest Management Area (scenic, geologic, botanical, zoological):	acres	0
Current Designated Wild & Scenic River Corridor (1/4 mile each side):	acres	0
Current Eligible Wild & Scenic River Corridor (1/4 mile each side):	acres	0
Research Natural Area:	acres	0

	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Size & Manageability		
Area, Total:	acres	6,174.8
Private/Non-Federal Inholdings, Total:	acres	0
Private/Non-Federal Inholdings, Count:	number	0
Outstanding or Reserved Subsurface Mineral Rights:	acres	0
Current Bald Management Area:	acres	0
Forest Research Plots, Count:	number	0



Name: Jarrett Creek

Acres: 8,972 acres

Description of Area

Location & Access

The Jarrett Creek area, located about 15 miles east of Asheville in McDowell County, lies within the Grandfather Ranger District on the Pisgah NF. The Blue Ridge Parkway defines the northwestern boundary and Curtis Creek Road (NFSR 482) borders the area on the eastern side.

The area can be accessed by trails that begin along the Blue Ridge Parkway – Heartbreak Ridge Trail (NFST 208) a hike/bike trail, and Newberry Creek Trail (NFST 210) and Snooks Nose Trail (NFST 211), both hike-only trails. Vehicular access is available via Newberry Creek Road (NFSR 482A), which runs off of Curtis Creek Road (NFSR 482) along the southeastern border.

Surroundings

The southeastern boundary borders Forest Service land with the exception of about two miles that borders non-federal land. The southern boundary is adjacent to both non-federal and Forest Service land. The northwestern boundary is primarily along National Park Service lands of the Blue Ridge Parkway.

Curtis Creek Campground, a developed Forest Service recreation area lies to the east of this area on Curtis Creek Road. The area abuts private residential properties on the southeast and south side. Andrews Geyser, a popular picnic area with a gravity-forced geyser, is located on non-Forest Service land to the southeast of this area, as is an active railroad track. To the west are non-federal forested lands near the community of Montreat.

Topography & Vegetation

The area is formed by a pronounced ridgeline that runs in a northeasterly direction along the Blue Ridge Parkway (a section of the Eastern Continental Divide) and Curtis Creek to the east. A system of minor ridges falls away in a south and southeasterly direction forming valleys and feeder streams to the Catawba River. The western border of the area does not reach the prominent ridgeline to the west but rather crosses downslope.

Most of the area has steep and rugged terrain, especially near the high ridges. Elevations range from about 5,000 feet on the northwestern border along the Blue Ridge Parkway near the fire tower on Green Knob, to about 1,700 feet on the southeastern border where Curtis Creek Road (NFSR 482) intersects Newberry Creek Road (NFSR 482A). Some forests in the area have old growth forest characteristics. Ecozones within the area include mesic oak, pine oak/heath, rich cove, and acidic cove.

Current Uses

Most of this area is the Jarrett Creek Inventoried Roadless Area and managed for backcountry recreation. Portions of the area to the southwest and northeast are managed for timber and wildlife habitat. Recreation uses in the area include hiking, backpacking, mountain biking, hunting and fishing, and gathering forest products. The area contains 11.5 miles of trails which includes approximately six miles of mountain biking trails. The area also has extensive use by special use permittees, often in large groups.

Newberry Creek Road (NFSR 482A) is a closed Forest Service maintenance level 2 road extending approximately 1.6 miles into the center of the area. Licklog Road (NFSR 482B) is a closed Forest Service

maintenance level 1 road contained in the northern portion that is approximately one mile long. Both roads are maintained as linear wildlife openings and there are wildlife fields off of NFSR482B. Additionally, Camp Rock Road (NFSR974) enters the area on the northeast side, this is a closed Forest Service maintenance level 1 road. There are several recent timber harvest areas along Curtis Creek Road to the east and on Birch Ridge to the south. Parts of the southern boundary are adjacent to an active railroad where there is high occurrence of fire, and suppression activities have resulted in several dozer fire-lines in the area.

Evaluation of Wilderness Characteristics

Apparent Naturalness

Although much of Jarrett Creek area has natural appearing forests, the area has been logged in the past and evidence of timber harvest and extraction routes are visible in some locations. Many old roads have recovered and are less evident to the average forest visitor. About 45 acres of recent timber harvest has occurred in the area, mostly along Curtis Creek Road. The area contains 2.2 miles of maintenance level 1 National Forest System (NFS) roads and 1.6 miles of closed maintenance level 2 NFS roads, which have three bridges. Most segments of NFS road serve as a linear wildlife openings. Maintained wildlife fields in the area total more than 12 acres, and are located to the north and south. There are fire containment lines along the southern boundary, near the railroad tracks. All of these detract from naturalness in the area.

Opportunities for Solitude or Primitive & Unconfined Recreation

Much of Jarrett Creek area has opportunities for solitude, but surrounding land uses and allowed activities within the area adversely affect solitude in some areas. Sights and sounds from the Blue Ridge Parkway, Curtis Creek Road, and the adjacent railroad affect solitude along the periphery of the area. Six miles of mountain bike trail cut through the center of the area, which at times are heavily used. Other impacts to solitude are from the high probability of user encounters due to extensive use of the area by special use permit holders, often taking large groups into the area. Opportunities for primitive and unconfined recreation exist within the area, but other non-conforming uses also exist, such as mountain biking.

Other Values - Unique or Outstanding Qualities

Part of the Jarrett Creek area was included in the first acquisition of National Forest land in the eastern United States, under the Weeks Act. There is one State Natural Heritage Area within the Jarrett Creek Area.

Size & Manageability

At 8,972 acres, the Jarrett Creek area has a large semi-primitive interior. Some area boundaries create narrow arms of land with adjacent uses that negatively affect solitude. The area also has over 2,800 acres of outstanding or reserved subsurface mineral rights.

Summary

The Jarrett Creek area includes many locations with natural appearing and mature forests, although areas with recent timber harvest or maintained wildlife field are less natural appearing. The area offers opportunities for primitive and unconfined recreation throughout much of the area. The area also offers opportunities for solitude in some locations, but sights and sounds of the adjacent Blue Ridge Parkway, NFSR482, and the town of Old Fort detract from solitude in the immediate vicinity of these roads.

Solitude is also impacted by high use on mountain bike trails and by encounters with large groups operating under special use permit.

Quantitative Summary of Items/Activities within the Jarrett Creek Area

Disclaimer: Information was generated from FS spatial datasets. All figures are approximate.

Description of Area	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Spruce-Fir Ecozone:	acres	34.0
Northern Hardwood Ecozone:	acres	326.2
High Elevation Red Oak Ecozone:	acres	451.8
Acidic Cove Ecozone:	acres	939.5
Rich Cove Ecozone:	acres	2,103.8
Mesic Oak Ecozone:	acres	2,695.5
Dry-Mesic Oak Ecozone:	acres	42.8
Dry Oak Ecozone:	acres	123.0
Pine-Oak/Heath Ecozone:	acres	2,155.4
Shortleaf Pine Ecozone:	acres	87.3
Alluvial Forest Ecozone:	acres	4.8

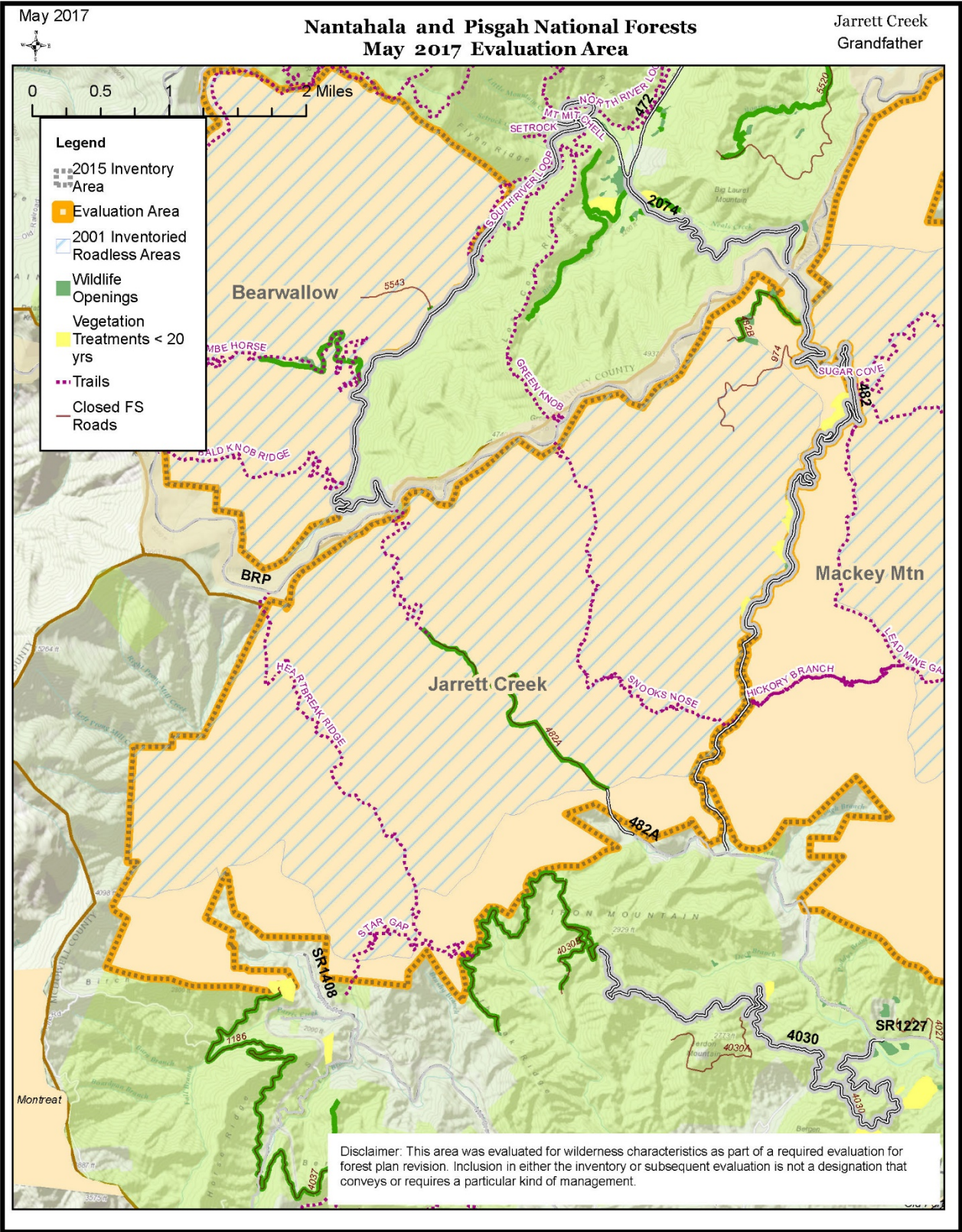
Apparent Naturalness	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Maintenance Level 1 National Forest System Roads:	miles	2.2
Closed Maintenance Level 2 National Forest System Roads:	miles	1.6
Road Stream Crossings, Bridge:	number	3
Road Stream Crossings, Other:	number	5
Trail Stream Crossings, Bridge:	number	0
Vegetation Management, 0-20 years old:	acres	45.0
Vegetation Management, 21-40 years old:	acres	1.2
Maintained Wildlife Fields (may overlap Bald Management Area):	acres	12.8
Existing Wilderness Study Area (WSA):	acres	0
Existing Inventoried Roadless Area (IRA may overlap WSA):	acres	7,439.0

Solitude or Primitive & Unconfined Recreation	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Current Backcountry Management Area (may overlap WSA & IRA):	acres	7,924.7
Inventoried Primitive Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) Setting:	acres	0
Inventoried Semi-Primitive Non-Motorized ROS Setting:	acres	3,786.8

	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Solitude or Primitive & Unconfined Recreation		
Inventoried Semi-Primitive Motorized ROS Setting (buffer of adjacent roads):	acres	556.2
Inventoried Roaded Natural ROS Setting (buffer of adjacent roads):	acres	4,624.2
National Forest System Trail, Hike-only Allowed Use:	miles	5.6
National Forest System Trail, Hike-Bike Allowed Use:	miles	5.9
National Forest System Trail, Hike-Horse Allowed Use:	miles	0
National Forest System Trail, Hike-Bike-Horse Allowed Use:	miles	0

	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Unique & Outstanding Features		
Current Special Interest Management Area (scenic, geologic, botanical, zoological):	acres	0
Current Designated Wild & Scenic River Corridor (1/4 mile each side):	acres	0
Current Eligible Wild & Scenic River Corridor (1/4 mile each side):	acres	0
Research Natural Area:	acres	0

	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Size & Manageability		
Area, Total:	acres	8,972.2
Private/Non-Federal Inholdings, Total:	acres	0
Private/Non-Federal Inholdings, Count:	number	0
Outstanding or Reserved Subsurface Mineral Rights:	acres	2,825.5
Current Bald Management Area:	acres	0
Forest Research Plots, Count:	number	2



Name: Linville Gorge Addition

Acres: 2,844 acres

Description of Area

Location & Access

The Linville Gorge addition is on the Grandfather Ranger District of the Pisgah NF in Burke County, NC; and is a potential extension to Linville Gorge Wilderness. The area lies south of National Forest System Road 99 to Table Rock Picnic Area, west of NFS Road 118, north of Russell Creek, and east of Linville Gorge Wilderness. Access is from Shortoff Trail, which passes over Shortoff Mountain and follows the gorge's rim along Linville Gorge Wilderness boundary between Wolf Pit trailhead and Table Rock Picnic Area. Additionally, the area can be accessed from NFS Road 118. There are no connecting NFS trails, but several constructed firebreaks extend into the area.

Surroundings

The area is predominately surrounded by Pisgah NF lands but there are two adjacent private tracts to the east and south. The eastern tract is forested with past timber harvesting, and the southern tract is a mix of forest and pasture. Linville Gorge Wilderness lies to the west, and the previously mentioned open NFS roads are to the north and east. Beyond NFS Road 118, national forest lands to the east are actively managed for timber and wildlife. The popular Table Rock Picnic Area and trailhead is approximately 0.2 miles from the area's northwestern boundary.

Topography & Vegetation

Much of the area has steep and rugged terrain, with large rock outcrops, unique rock formations, and cliffs. Stream gradients are steep in places with many rock faces and large boulders. Dry drainages are common, scoured to bedrock during heavy rain events. In many locations the area is very rocky and dry with shallow soils, this is especially prevalent along ridges. The highest point is 3,557 feet in elevation at The Chimneys, and the lowest is 1,290 feet along Back Creek; a 2,267 foot change in elevation. The area has sparse pine-oak-heath forests along ridges, and dense acidic cove forests in the drainages. Many of the hemlocks are dead from infestations of hemlock woolly adelgid, and large portions of the area have been impacted by recent wildfires.

Current Uses

Most of the area is managed for scenery and wildlife, with small areas to the east managed for timber. All but about 140 acres was designated as the Linville Gorge Inventoried Roadless Area in 2001. There are no NFS roads, recent timber management activities, or maintained wildlife fields in the area; however, there are several miles of constructed firebreaks, some of which follow old logging roads and are used for search and rescue operations. One of these roads leads to an open area southeast of The Chimneys which has been used as a helicopter landing zone.

To some degree, this area serves as a buffer or containment zone for wildfires originating in Linville Gorge Wilderness or those potentially spreading into the wilderness from the east. There are also several areas planted as fire recovery and ongoing non-native invasive species eradication treatments in this area.

The area contains portions of the Shortoff Trail, where is snakes in and out of Linville Gorge Wilderness along the gorge's rim and is also part of the Mountains to Sea National Recreation Trail. As an Inventoried Roadless Area, the area is primarily used for backcountry recreation by hunters, hikers,

backpackers, and rock climbers. Firebreaks have been used for illegal ATV access, especially to the south. This area is also used by mountain bikers and equestrians as well as regular recreation special use events (foot races). The area also has extensive use by special use permittees, often in large groups.

Evaluation of Wilderness Characteristics

Apparent Naturalness

Most of the area has been managed to preserve scenic conditions under the Nantahala and Pisgah Land and Resource Management Plan since 1994 and roadless character as an Inventoried Road Area since 2001; therefore, the majority of the area has natural-appearing conditions. The area has no structures, highly developed NFS trails, mountain bike trails, NFS roads, or maintained wildlife fields. There is evidence of past logging roads, some of which are still very apparent on the ground, but these are limited within the scope of the entire area.

Wildfires in the area have necessitated the construction of firebreaks that look much like roads or OHV trails. Some of these firebreaks follow ridgelines, while others are cut into the side-slope. One of these routes has been used for search and rescue, and contains constructed lead-off ditches for storm-water drainage and a cleared helicopter landing zone downslope of The Chimneys. In the southern portion of the area, these firebreaks and other access points have led to the creation of a spider-web of illegal ATV trails. All of these uses, legal and illegal, have left lasting marks on the landscape. Due to dry conditions, shallow rocky soils, and fragile vegetation, these created trails are slow to recover and difficult to restore.

Opportunities for Solitude or Primitive & Unconfined Recreation

Area boundaries have adjacent private lands and roads where sights or sounds of equipment or vehicles may occasionally be experienced; however, the area is predominately a remote backcountry with many opportunities for solitude. In most locations topography enhances opportunities for solitude, as landforms shield the area from sights and sounds of civilization. At the point where the Shortoff Trail comes out of Linville Gorge Wilderness along the rim, it receives heavy use at times and the probability of encounters can be high; but most of the area has no NFS trail access and is not commonly used by forest visitors. Nevertheless, the area offers many opportunities for primitive and unconfined recreation, such as hiking, backpacking, hunting, fishing, bouldering, and rock climbing.

Other Values - Unique or Outstanding Qualities

The Linville Gorge Addition area has notable scenic beauty. There are many unique rock formations, cliffs, and boulder strewn streams in the area. Linville Gorge is one of the most notable geologic features in the Southeastern United States, and the western boundary of this area includes portions of rock formations along the gorge's rim at The Chimneys and Shortoff Mountain. This unique habitat also supports rare plants including the federally endangered heller's blazing star.

Size & Manageability

This area would be considered a potential extension to Linville Gorge Wilderness. Area boundaries have no narrow protrusions or non-federal lands extending into the area. There are no rights of way, outstanding subsurface mineral rights, or non-federal inholdings. As an Inventoried Roadless Area, most of the area is currently managed to preserve roadless characteristics.

Summary

The Linville Gorge Addition has some evidence of past management and recent fire suppression activities. Miles of constructed firebreaks negatively affect apparent naturalness of the area. There are

opportunities for solitude and primitive and unconfined recreation. As an Inventoried Roadless Area it has been managed to preserve roadless character for many years. The size, boundary configuration, and surroundings all contribute to manageability as wilderness, and there are no NFS roads, recent timber management, or maintained wildlife fields in the area. The Linville Gorge Addition also has outstanding and unique geologic features, scenery, and habitat for rare plants.

Quantitative Summary of Items/Activities within the Linville Gorge Addition Area

Disclaimer: Information was generated from FS spatial datasets. All figures are approximate.

Description of Area	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Spruce-Fir Ecozone:	acres	0
Northern Hardwood Ecozone:	acres	0
High Elevation Red Oak Ecozone:	acres	0
Acidic Cove Ecozone:	acres	1,130.9
Rich Cove Ecozone:	acres	9.2
Mesic Oak Ecozone:	acres	36.7
Dry-Mesic Oak Ecozone:	acres	419.8
Dry Oak Ecozone:	acres	29.4
Pine-Oak/Heath Ecozone:	acres	923.4
Shortleaf Pine Ecozone:	acres	277.9
Alluvial Forest Ecozone:	acres	32.6

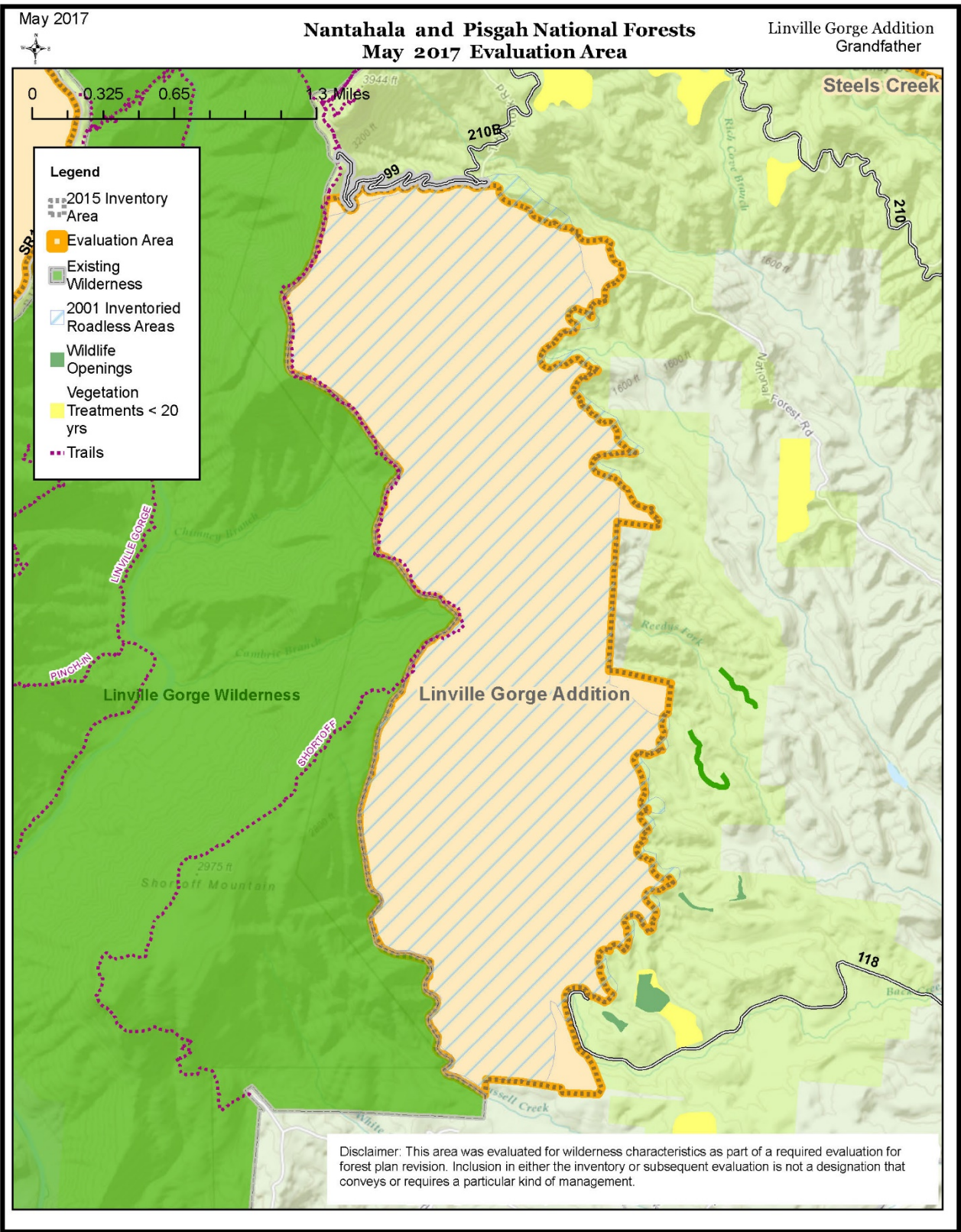
Apparent Naturalness	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Maintenance Level 1 National Forest System Roads:	miles	0
Closed Maintenance Level 2 National Forest System Roads:	miles	0
Road Stream Crossings, Bridge:	number	0
Road Stream Crossings, Other:	number	0
Trail Stream Crossings, Bridge:	number	0
Vegetation Management, 0-20 years old:	acres	0
Vegetation Management, 21-40 years old:	acres	69.0
Maintained Wildlife Fields (may overlap Bald Management Area):	acres	0
Existing Wilderness Study Area (WSA):	acres	0
Existing Inventoried Roadless Area (IRA may overlap WSA):	acres	2,705.2

Solitude or Primitive & Unconfined Recreation	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Current Backcountry Management Area (may overlap WSA & IRA):	acres	0
Inventoried Primitive Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) Setting:	acres	0

	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Solitude or Primitive & Unconfined Recreation		
Inventoried Semi-Primitive Non-Motorized ROS Setting:	acres	985.6
Inventoried Semi-Primitive Motorized ROS Setting (buffer of adjacent roads):	acres	677.0
Inventoried Roaded Natural ROS Setting (buffer of adjacent roads):	acres	1,181.6
National Forest System Trail, Hike-only Allowed Use:	miles	2.3
National Forest System Trail, Hike-Bike Allowed Use:	miles	0
National Forest System Trail, Hike-Horse Allowed Use:	miles	0
National Forest System Trail, Hike-Bike-Horse Allowed Use:	miles	0

	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Unique & Outstanding Features		
Current Special Interest Management Area (scenic, geologic, botanical, zoological):	acres	0
Current Designated Wild & Scenic River Corridor (1/4 mile each side):	acres	0
Current Eligible Wild & Scenic River Corridor (1/4 mile each side):	acres	0
Research Natural Area:	acres	0

	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Size & Manageability		
Area, Total:	acres	2,844.2
Private/Non-Federal Inholdings, Total:	acres	0
Private/Non-Federal Inholdings, Count:	number	0
Outstanding or Reserved Subsurface Mineral Rights:	acres	0
Current Bald Management Area:	acres	0
Forest Research Plots, Count:	number	0



Name: Linville Pinnacle Extension

Acres: 619 acres

Description of Area

Location & Access

The Linville Pinnacle Extension area is located in Burke County and is just south of Linville Gorge Wilderness. State route 1238 borders it on the western side and NFSR117 borders the area on the east. Access to the area is from the Mountains to Sea Trail via NC1238, although the trail only briefly crosses into the area.

Surroundings

The area boundaries are generally smooth on the western side but the eastern boundary is highly irregular as it follows Shooks Creek Road (NFSR4013) and Wolf Pit Road (NFSR117), both of which are closed maintenance level 2 roads. The northern boundary is adjacent to Linville Gorge Wilderness, and the eastern boundary is adjacent to National Forest System lands.

Topography & Vegetation

The Linville Pinnacle Extension area lies at the southern end of the western rim that defines the Linville Gorge Wilderness. The area has steep terrain with elevations ranging from approximately 2,800 feet at the Pinnacle, the prominent peak for which the area is named, down to roughly 1,660 feet at a tributary stream that feeds into Sandy Branch. This area drains down to the final stretch of the Linville River before discharge at Lake James. Ecozones represented in the area include acidic cove, dry-mesic oak, and pine-oak/heath. There are approximately 500 acres of white pine dominated vegetation in the area.

Current Uses

The Linville Pinnacle area is used for hiking and viewing scenery of the Linville Gorge Wilderness area as well as vegetation and wildlife habitat management. There are approximately 70 acres that have had recent vegetation management, 38 of which have been within the last 20 years, and two wildlife fields that are currently maintained for wildlife habitat. The Mountains to Sea Trail branches off from NC1238, where it joins the Over Mountain Victory Trail, and briefly runs up to the Pinnacle before exiting the area to the north. The area also has extensive use by special use permittees, often in large groups.

Evaluation of Wilderness Characteristics

Apparent Naturalness

The Linville Pinnacle Extension area has no National Forest System roads within its boundaries but past vegetation management projects and current wildlife habitat openings are still visible on the landscape. There is a non-system road that is maintained to access the wildlife fields on the western side. The only trail in the area is a short segment of the Mountains to Sea Trail that leads up to the Pinnacle before exiting north into Linville Gorge Wilderness. There are two closed maintenance level 2 roads adjacent to the eastern boundary that are visible from higher vantage points, as well as the developed area near Lake James to the southeast. The northern portion of the area's periphery was impacted by construction of a perimeter fire line upslope of Shooks Branch during the 2007 Pinnacle wildfire. In addition, the high intensity fire resulted in non-native infestations across the rocky steeper portions of Linville Pinnacle Extension. Widely scattered invasive species have been treated along the adjacent roads.

Opportunities for Solitude or Primitive & Unconfined Recreation

The Linville Pinnacle Extension area is adjacent to Linville Gorge Wilderness and there are locations within the area with opportunities for solitude. Sights and sounds of civilization are evident from vehicular travel on NC1238. Areas managed for wildlife habitat and vegetation regeneration are apparent from vantage points within the area.

Other Values - Unique or Outstanding Qualities

Pinnacle Peak offers a unique vantage point with expansive views of the landforms that form the Linville Gorge: Jonas Ridge to the east, Linville Mountain to the west, and the Linville River below.

Size & Manageability

At 620 acres, this area would be considered as an extension to Linville Gorge Wilderness. The northern boundary is adjacent to the wilderness area, the western boundary is separated from the Dobson Knob area by NC1238, and the eastern boundary is adjacent to national forest system lands. The eastern boundary is defined by Wolf Pit Road (NFSR117), a closed maintenance level 2 road. There are approximately six acres of outstanding or reserved mineral rights within the area.

Summary

This area south of the Linville Gorge Wilderness has visible impacts from recent vegetation management, maintenance of wildlife fields and closed roads, all of which detract from the naturalness of the area. This relatively small area is on average just a half mile wide and bordered by two roads on the eastern and western sides which impact the area's solitude with sounds of vehicular traffic that penetrate throughout much of the area.

Quantitative Summary of Items/Activities within the Linville Pinnacle Extension Area

Disclaimer: Information was generated from FS spatial datasets. All figures are approximate.

Description of Area	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Spruce-Fir Ecozone:	acres	0
Northern Hardwood Ecozone:	acres	0
High Elevation Red Oak Ecozone:	acres	0
Acidic Cove Ecozone:	acres	256.8
Rich Cove Ecozone:	acres	4.1
Mesic Oak Ecozone:	acres	2.4
Dry-Mesic Oak Ecozone:	acres	123.4
Dry Oak Ecozone:	acres	10.7
Pine-Oak/Heath Ecozone:	acres	218.6
Shortleaf Pine Ecozone:	acres	4.0
Alluvial Forest Ecozone:	acres	0

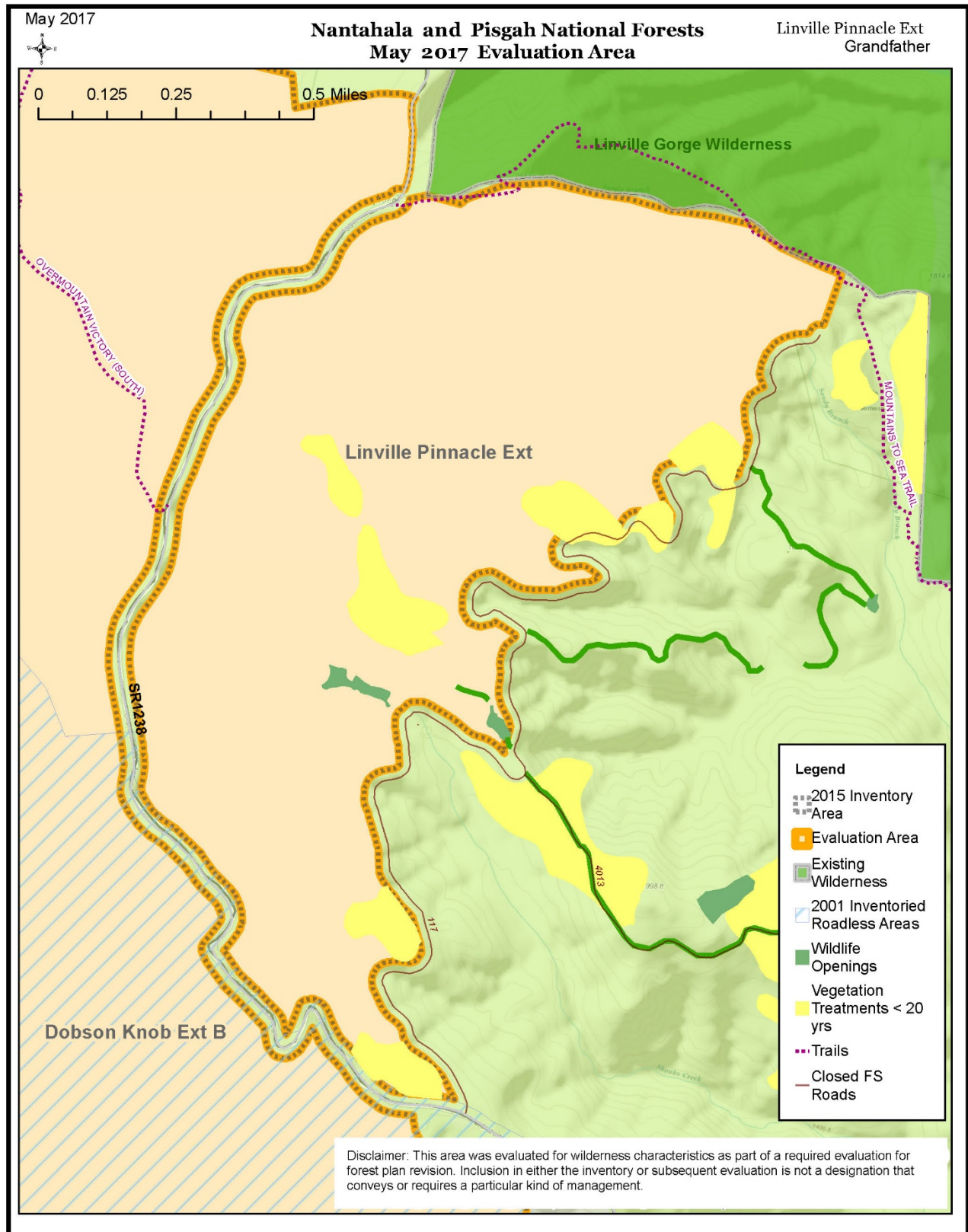
Apparent Naturalness	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Maintenance Level 1 National Forest System Roads:	miles	0
Closed Maintenance Level 2 National Forest System Roads:	miles	0
Road Stream Crossings, Bridge:	number	0
Road Stream Crossings, Other:	number	0
Trail Stream Crossings, Bridge:	number	0
Vegetation Management, 0-20 years old:	acres	38.4
Vegetation Management, 21-40 years old:	acres	31.9
Maintained Wildlife Fields (may overlap Bald Management Area):	acres	0.7
Existing Wilderness Study Area (WSA):	acres	0
Existing Inventoried Roadless Area (IRA may overlap WSA):	acres	0.3

Solitude or Primitive & Unconfined Recreation	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Current Backcountry Management Area (may overlap WSA & IRA):	acres	0
Inventoried Primitive Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) Setting:	acres	0

	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Solitude or Primitive & Unconfined Recreation		
Inventoried Semi-Primitive Non-Motorized ROS Setting:	acres	0
Inventoried Semi-Primitive Motorized ROS Setting (buffer of adjacent roads):	acres	0
Inventoried Roaded Natural ROS Setting (buffer of adjacent roads):	acres	620.0
National Forest System Trail, Hike-only Allowed Use:	miles	0.2
National Forest System Trail, Hike-Bike Allowed Use:	miles	0
National Forest System Trail, Hike-Horse Allowed Use:	miles	0
National Forest System Trail, Hike-Bike-Horse Allowed Use:	miles	0

	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Unique & Outstanding Features		
Current Special Interest Management Area (scenic, geologic, botanical, zoological):	acres	0
Current Designated Wild & Scenic River Corridor (1/4 mile each side):	acres	0
Current Eligible Wild & Scenic River Corridor (1/4 mile each side):	acres	0
Research Natural Area:	acres	0

	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Size & Manageability		
Area, Total:	acres	620.0
Private/Non-Federal Inholdings, Total:	acres	0
Private/Non-Federal Inholdings, Count:	number	0
Outstanding or Reserved Subsurface Mineral Rights:	acres	6.4
Current Bald Management Area:	acres	0
Forest Research Plots, Count:	number	0



Name: Lost Cove

Acres: 5,934 acres

Description of Area

Location & Access

The Lost Cove area is on the Grandfather Ranger District of the Pisgah NF in Avery County, NC. The area lies west of Wilson Creek Wild and Scenic River (WSR), National Forest System (NFS) Road 981, and State Roads (SR) 90 and 1328; north of NFS Road 464; east of the Blue Ridge Parkway (BRP); and south of SR 1511. Access is from several hiking trails in the area and trailheads on these State and NFS roads.

Surroundings

The Lost Cove area is adjacent to Pisgah NF lands to the south, northeast, and north. The area is north of Harper Creek Wilderness Study Area, separated by NFS Road 464. To the west are federal lands of the Blue Ridge Parkway. There are several non-federal tracts adjacent to the area on the north, east, and southwest. A housing development lies north of the area at Little Bald and Big Rough Knob, and there are agricultural lands at Ned Mountain. To the east are forested lands, as well as residential and agricultural uses on the lower reaches of Lost Cove Creek. To the west are agricultural and forested lands on Big Lost Cove Ridge and residential lands on the headwaters of Lost Cove Creek. Most of the area is bounded by State roads, NFS roads, or the Blue Ridge Parkway.

Topography & Vegetation

Much of the area has steep and rugged terrain, with large rock outcrops and cliffs. Stream gradients are also steep in places with many rock faces, large boulders, and numerous waterfalls. The highest point is 3,960 feet in elevation near the Blue Ridge Parkway, and the lowest is 1,640 feet along Lost Cove Creek; a 2,320 foot change in elevation. The area is covered with dense hardwood and pine forests in the uplands and rhododendron and hemlock along stream channels. Many of the hemlocks are dead from infestations of the hemlock woolly adelgid. Dominant ecozones in the area include acidic cove, pine-oak heath, and mesic oak.

Current Uses

Most of the Lost Cove area was designated by Congress as a Wilderness Study Area in 1984. The Wilderness Study Area was recommended for wilderness designation in the 1987 Nantahala and Pisgah National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan. The area has been managed to maintain wilderness characteristics and provide primitive backcountry recreation since that time. Much of the area was also identified as an Inventoried Roadless Area in 2001. There are no recent timber management activities in the area; however, there are two maintained wildlife fields in the south and two along the northern boundary, totaling 7.4 acres. Each of these fields is accessed by non-NFS roads. There is approximately one mile of Maintenance Level 1 closed NFS roads in the area. All of these wildlife fields, access routes, and NFS roads are within the Wilderness Study Area and Inventoried Roadless Area boundaries. The area also has extensive use by special use permittees, often in large groups. To the west, on Big Lost Cove Ridge and near the headwaters of North Harper Creek, a cleared utility line corridor crosses the area.

The area contains approximately 12 miles of NFS trails designated as hike-only; some of which receive unauthorized mountain bike use. The area is used by hunters, hikers, backpackers, and rock climbers.

Area streams are popular for swimming, water play, backcountry angling for trout, and kayaking during high water levels.

Evaluation of Wilderness Characteristics

Apparent Naturalness

The majority of the Lost Cove area has been managed to preserve wilderness characteristics since the 1980's. Therefore, the area is predominately natural appearing and has no structures, highly developed hiking trails, or designated mountain bike trails. The exception are four maintained wildlife fields, their access routes, and three segments of low maintenance level NFS roads; one of which is open seasonally. The cleared utility line corridor that crosses the southwest corner of the area detracts from naturalness but is not pervasive across the entire area. Unauthorized mountain bike use has degraded some trails in the area. There is some evidence of old logging roads but they have primarily healed-over and blend with the natural appearing landscape. The area bordered by SR 1511 on the north, which is proposed for paving by the NC Department of Transportation.

Opportunities for Solitude or Primitive & Unconfined Recreation

Although area boundaries have adjacent private lands and roads where sights or sounds of equipment or vehicles may be experienced, the area is predominately a remote backcountry with many opportunities for solitude. In most locations, topography enhances opportunities for solitude, as landforms shield the area from sights and sounds of surrounding civilization. The Blue Ride Parkway is visible to the west and sounds of vehicles can be heard, but primarily only from lands immediately adjacent to the roadway and some high ridges. Area trails are not heavily used, except those accessing streams, waterfalls, and swimming holes. Encounters with other visitors would be a higher possibility at these locations during peak use seasons, but the area offers many opportunities for hiking and backcountry exploration where visitor encounters are a low probability.

Most of the area is undeveloped and offers opportunities for primitive and unconfined recreation, such as hiking, backpacking, water play, hunting, fishing, rock climbing, and kayaking. There is unauthorized mountain bike use in the area, which is not considered a primitive type of recreation, but increased visitor education and enforcement has controlled some of this use.

Other Values - Unique or Outstanding Qualities

The area has outstanding geologic features and scenic beauty. There are many waterfalls, such as Huntfish Falls, Little Lost Cove Creek Falls, and Gragg Prong Falls. At Big Lost Cove Cliffs there are exposed rock ridge-tops and sheer rock faces and there are many smaller rock outcrops and boulder strewn streams throughout the area. Some of the area's forests have old growth characteristics. Many streams in the area are high quality trout waters and a portion of the area includes the Wilson Creek Wild and Scenic River corridor. The federally threatened Heller's blazing star (*Liatris helleri*) occurs in this area. There are three State Natural Heritage Areas within the Lost Cove Area.

Size & Manageability

At 5,934 acres, the Lost Cove area is of sufficient size to make practicable its preservation and use in an unimpaired condition. Area boundaries have relatively few narrow protrusions or non-federal lands extending into the area; an exception to this is at the lower reaches of Lost Cove Creek, but this boundary configuration has little effect on current management as backcountry. There are no non-federal inholdings or outstanding subsurface mineral rights; however, there is a powerline easement on

the western boundary on Big Lost Cove Ridge. As a Wilderness Study Area, most of the area is currently managed to preserve wilderness characteristics.

Summary

The Lost Cove area is predominately natural appearing, has opportunities for solitude, and for primitive and unconfined recreation. As an Inventoried Roadless Area and congressionally designated Wilderness Study Area, Lost Cove has been managed to preserve wilderness characteristics for many years and was recommended for wilderness designation in the 1987 Nantahala and Pisgah National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan. The size, boundary configuration, and surroundings all contribute to manageability as wilderness.

Quantitative Summary of Items/Activities within the Lost Cove Area

Disclaimer: Information was generated from FS spatial datasets. All figures are approximate.

Description of Area	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Spruce-Fir Ecozone:	acres	0
Northern Hardwood Ecozone:	acres	0.0
High Elevation Red Oak Ecozone:	acres	0
Acidic Cove Ecozone:	acres	2,116.2
Rich Cove Ecozone:	acres	656.6
Mesic Oak Ecozone:	acres	1,249.6
Dry-Mesic Oak Ecozone:	acres	105.3
Dry Oak Ecozone:	acres	425.3
Pine-Oak/Heath Ecozone:	acres	1,302.1
Shortleaf Pine Ecozone:	acres	4.7
Alluvial Forest Ecozone:	acres	137.9

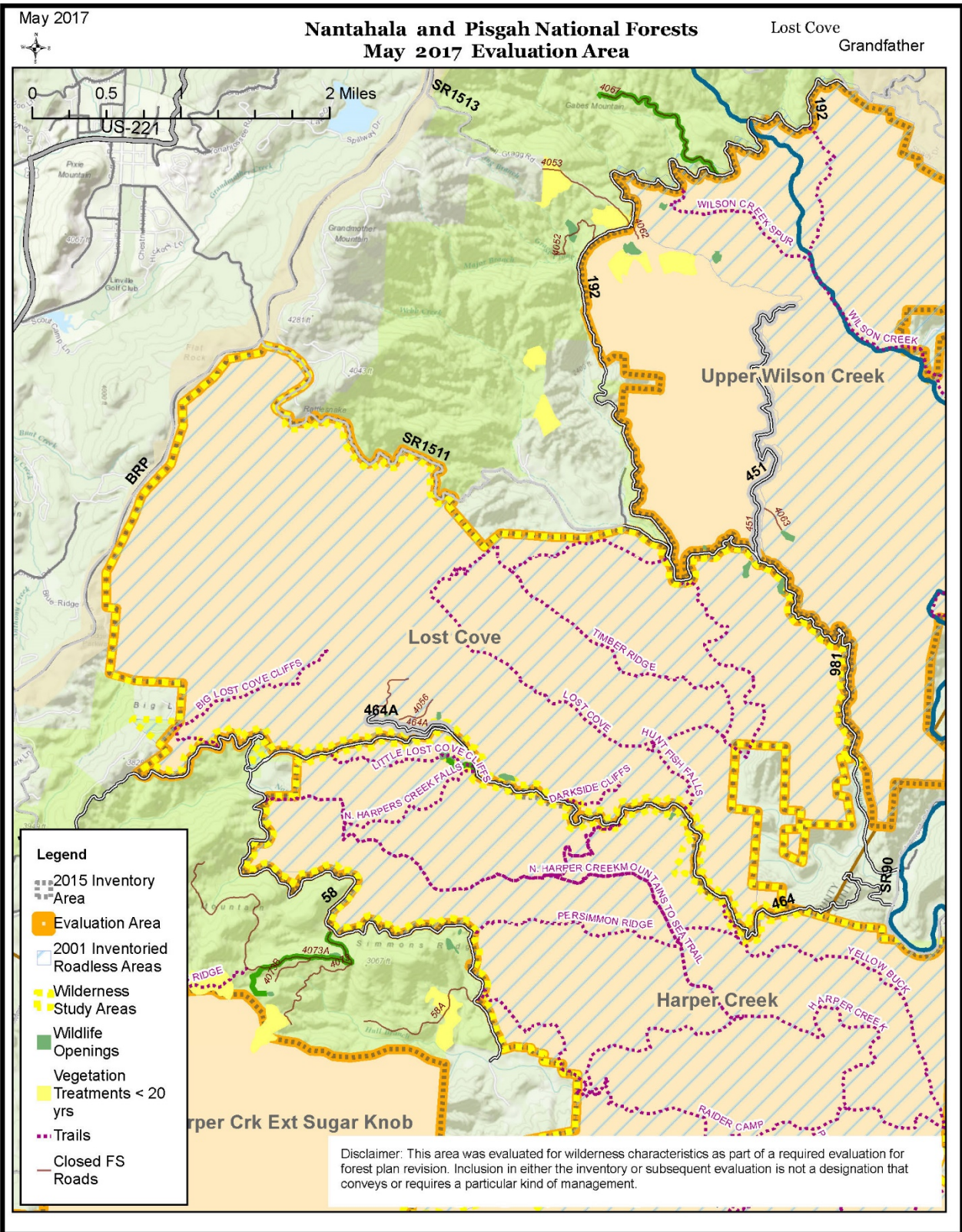
Apparent Naturalness	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Maintenance Level 1 National Forest System Roads:	miles	0.5
Closed Maintenance Level 2 National Forest System Roads:	miles	0.4
Road Stream Crossings, Bridge:	number	0
Road Stream Crossings, Other:	number	1
Trail Stream Crossings, Bridge:	number	0
Vegetation Management, 0-20 years old:	acres	0
Vegetation Management, 21-40 years old:	acres	4.9
Maintained Wildlife Fields (may overlap Bald Management Area):	acres	7.4
Existing Wilderness Study Area (WSA):	acres	5,679.1
Existing Inventoried Roadless Area (IRA may overlap WSA):	acres	5,899.4

Solitude or Primitive & Unconfined Recreation	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Current Backcountry Management Area (may overlap WSA & IRA):	acres	0
Inventoried Primitive Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) Setting:	acres	0
Inventoried Semi-Primitive Non-Motorized ROS Setting:	acres	1,778.1

	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Solitude or Primitive & Unconfined Recreation		
Inventoried Semi-Primitive Motorized ROS Setting (buffer of adjacent roads):	acres	226.6
Inventoried Roded Natural ROS Setting (buffer of adjacent roads):	acres	3,928.6
National Forest System Trail, Hike-only Allowed Use:	miles	11.8
National Forest System Trail, Hike-Bike Allowed Use:	miles	0
National Forest System Trail, Hike-Horse Allowed Use:	miles	0
National Forest System Trail, Hike-Bike-Horse Allowed Use:	miles	0

	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Unique & Outstanding Features		
Current Special Interest Management Area (scenic, geologic, botanical, zoological):	acres	0
Current Designated Wild & Scenic River Corridor (1/4 mile each side):	acres	0
Current Eligible Wild & Scenic River Corridor (1/4 mile each side):	acres	0
Research Natural Area:	acres	0

	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Size & Manageability		
Area, Total:	acres	5,934.0
Private/Non-Federal Inholdings, Total:	acres	0
Private/Non-Federal Inholdings, Count:	number	0
Outstanding or Reserved Subsurface Mineral Rights:	acres	0
Current Bald Management Area:	acres	0
Forest Research Plots, Count:	number	2



Name: Mackey Mountain

Acres: 14,985 acres

Description of Area

Location & Access

The Mackey Mountain area is on the Grandfather Ranger District of the Pisgah NF in McDowell County, NC. The area lies southeast of the Blue Ridge Parkway, east of National Forest System (NFS) Road 482 (Curtis Creek Road), southwest of State Road (SR) 80, and north of US70. Access into this area is very limited and is primarily from Curtis Creek Road (NFSR482).

Surroundings

The area is bordered by NF lands on the northeast, west, and southwest. The National Park Service lands of the Blue Ridge Parkway are to the northwest, and private lands border the east and south. The majority of private lands to the northeast along SR80 are forested with a few small farms and a rock quarry. The Clear Creek community to the east is also a mix of forested lands with residential and agricultural uses. The same is true for private lands along US70 and Mackey Creek to the south, and Curtis Creek community to the southwest. The USFS Curtis Creek Campground is just west of the area along Curtis Creek Road, and the towns of Old Fort, West Marion, and Marion are to the south and southeast.

Topography & Vegetation

Much of the area has steep and rugged terrain, with dense forests and boulder-strewn streams. The highest point is 3,990 feet in elevation at Mackey Mountain, and the lowest is 1,370 feet near Clear Creek; a 2,620 foot change in elevation. The area has thousands of acres with old growth characteristics in diverse hardwood forests. Pine-oak heath forests are on the drier sites, and hemlocks occur along stream channels. Many of the hemlocks are dead from infestations of hemlock woolly adelgid. Dominant ecozones in the area include rich cove, pine-oak heath, mesic oak, and acidic cove.

Current Uses

Under the current Nantahala and Pisgah NFs Land and Resource Management Plan, most of the area is managed for backcountry recreation, and much of the core area was identified as the Mackey Mountain Inventoried Roadless Area in 2001. Portions of the area in the north and east are managed for scenery and wildlife, and an area to the southwest is managed for timber and wildlife. There is a 1.5 mile segment of low maintenance level NFS road in the area used to access a municipal water intake for the town of Marion. There are no recent timber management activities or maintained wildlife fields within the area. The area is used by special use permittees, often in large groups or by multiple groups simultaneously.

The area contains approximately 14 miles of NFS trails designated as hike-only. The area is used for hiking, backpacking, nature study, hunting, and backcountry trout fishing.

Evaluation of Wilderness Characteristics

Apparent Naturalness

The majority of the area has been managed for backcountry recreation for many years. There are no highly developed hiking trails, timber management areas, or maintained wildlife fields in the area. There is one low maintenance level NFS road used to access a municipal water intake on Mackey Creek, and

the associated intake structure. Much of this area was rail and flume logged in the past and evidence of historic timber extraction in the area includes old rail routes, logging cables, and a rail cart. However, parts of the area were untouched by early 20th century logging, and old growth characteristics have been preserved across thousands of acres, representing one of the largest contiguous blocks of natural appearing forest on the Pisgah NF.

Opportunities for Solitude or Primitive & Unconfined Recreation

Although area boundaries have adjacent private lands and roads where sights or sounds of civilization are evident, the area is predominately a remote backcountry with many opportunities for solitude; especially in the core area centered within the Inventoried Roadless Area. To the northwest is the Blue Ride Parkway, and to the east and south are US highways and adjacent residences, farms, and a quarry. The towns of Old Fort, west Marion, and Marion can be seen from some ridge tops and southeastern slopes, and vehicles occasionally use Lower Mackey Creek Road for administrative access to the Marion water intake. These sights and sounds of civilization may be evident from various locations and could negatively affect solitude, but their impacts are not pervasive across the entire area. For the most part, area trails are not heavily used and encounters with other visitors is typically low; however, special use permit holders routinely take multiple groups of 10 or more people into the area.

Most of the area is undeveloped and offers many opportunities for primitive and unconfined recreation, such as hiking, backpacking, hunting, and backcountry angling. Some inholdings, rights-of-way, and narrow arms of federal ownership along the eastern and southern boundaries tend to confine recreation use in these locations, as users would not have the ability to move through these areas without the possibility of encountering infrastructure or motorized vehicles.

Other Values - Unique or Outstanding Qualities

Portions of the Mackey Mountain area were included in one of the first National Forest acquisitions in the east under the Weeks Act. The area has over 8,600 acres of designated old growth, representing one of the largest patches of designated old growth on the Pisgah NF. There are two State Natural Heritage Area within the Mackey Mountain Area.

Size & Manageability

At 14,985 acres, the area is of sufficient size to manage its preservation and use in an unimpaired condition throughout much of the area. However, area boundaries have several narrow protrusions and non-federal lands extending into the area. There are two non-federal inholdings with rights-of-way, 182 acres of outstanding subsurface mineral rights, and a municipal water intake on Mackey Creek. However, the core Inventoried Roadless Area is currently managed for backcountry recreation, and has a higher degree of wilderness characteristics compared to the areas outside of the IRA.

Summary

The Mackey Mountain area overall is predominately natural appearing, and has excellent opportunities for solitude, and for primitive and unconfined recreation; this is primarily true for the core Inventoried Roadless Area which has a high degree of wilderness characteristics and unique old growth forests. Area boundaries are irregular and interface with private inholdings, easements, and a municipal water intake with an administrative access road, all of which negatively impact wilderness characteristics and manageability along the periphery. While sights and sounds of adjacent towns and highways may affect solitude from high ridges and southern slopes, these impacts are not pervasive across the entire area.

Quantitative Summary of Items/Activities within the Mackey Mountain Area

Disclaimer: Information was generated from FS spatial datasets. All figures are approximate.

Description of Area	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Spruce-Fir Ecozone:	acres	0
Northern Hardwood Ecozone:	acres	10.7
High Elevation Red Oak Ecozone:	acres	27.0
Acidic Cove Ecozone:	acres	2,020.0
Rich Cove Ecozone:	acres	4,821.9
Mesic Oak Ecozone:	acres	2,956.2
Dry-Mesic Oak Ecozone:	acres	135.3
Dry Oak Ecozone:	acres	256.0
Pine-Oak/Heath Ecozone:	acres	4,180.3
Shortleaf Pine Ecozone:	acres	512.8
Alluvial Forest Ecozone:	acres	68.9

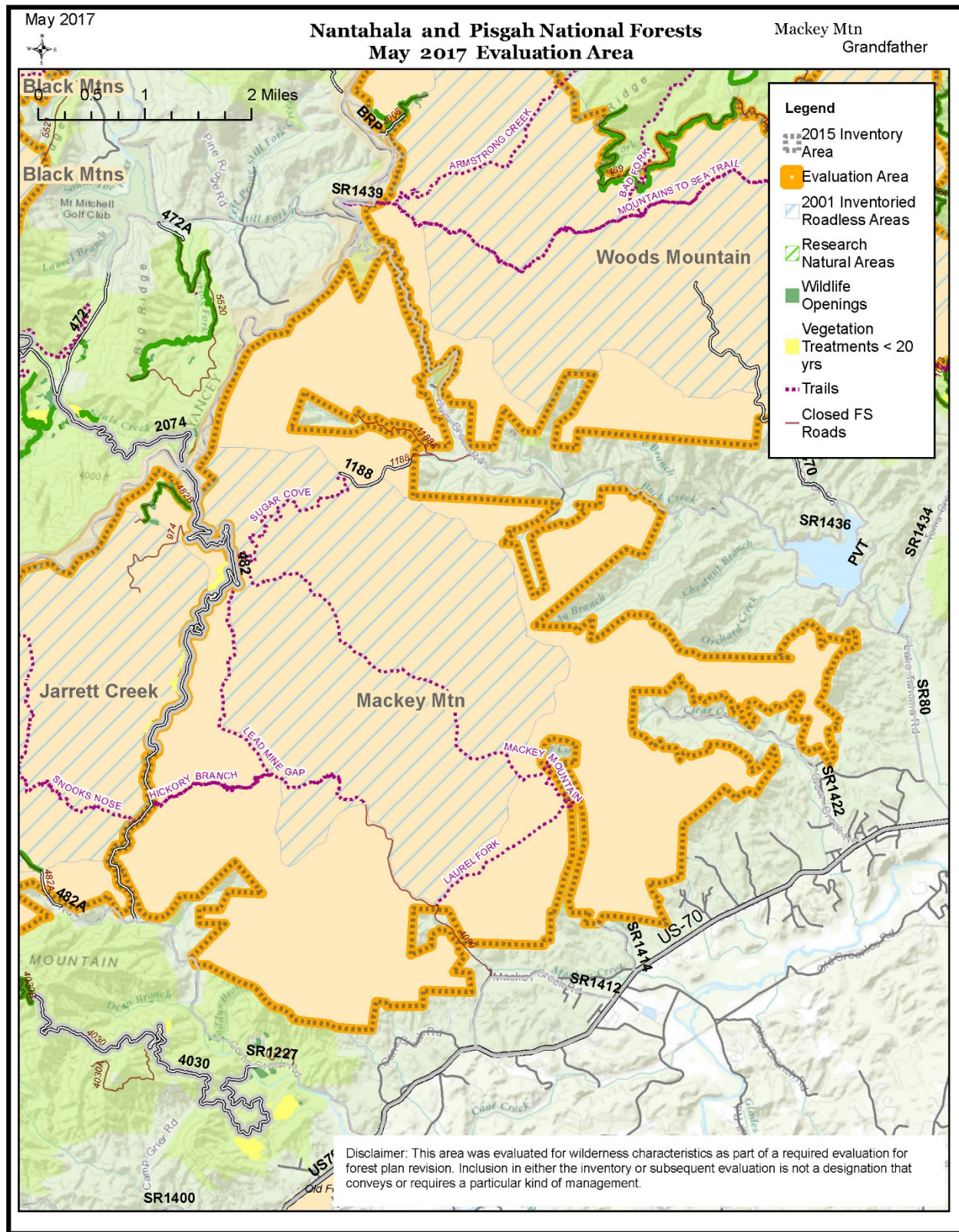
Apparent Naturalness	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Maintenance Level 1 National Forest System Roads:	miles	0
Closed Maintenance Level 2 National Forest System Roads:	miles	1.5
Road Stream Crossings, Bridge:	number	1
Road Stream Crossings, Other:	number	5
Trail Stream Crossings, Bridge:	number	0
Vegetation Management, 0-20 years old:	acres	0
Vegetation Management, 21-40 years old:	acres	70.4
Maintained Wildlife Fields (may overlap Bald Management Area):	acres	0
Existing Wilderness Study Area (WSA):	acres	0
Existing Inventoried Roadless Area (IRA may overlap WSA):	acres	5,912.2

Solitude or Primitive & Unconfined Recreation	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Current Backcountry Management Area (may overlap WSA & IRA):	acres	13,655.3
Inventoried Primitive Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) Setting:	acres	0
Inventoried Semi-Primitive Non-Motorized ROS Setting:	acres	8,036.5

	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Solitude or Primitive & Unconfined Recreation		
Inventoried Semi-Primitive Motorized ROS Setting (buffer of adjacent roads):	acres	1,742.7
Inventoried Roded Natural ROS Setting (buffer of adjacent roads):	acres	5,188.3
National Forest System Trail, Hike-only Allowed Use:	miles	14.3
National Forest System Trail, Hike-Bike Allowed Use:	miles	0
National Forest System Trail, Hike-Horse Allowed Use:	miles	0
National Forest System Trail, Hike-Bike-Horse Allowed Use:	miles	0

	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Unique & Outstanding Features		
Current Special Interest Management Area (scenic, geologic, botanical, zoological):	acres	0
Current Designated Wild & Scenic River Corridor (1/4 mile each side):	acres	0
Current Eligible Wild & Scenic River Corridor (1/4 mile each side):	acres	0
Research Natural Area:	acres	0

	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Size & Manageability		
Area, Total:	acres	14,985.3
Private/Non-Federal Inholdings, Total:	acres	126.7
Private/Non-Federal Inholdings, Count:	number	2
Outstanding or Reserved Subsurface Mineral Rights:	acres	181.6
Current Bald Management Area:	acres	0
Forest Research Plots, Count:	number	1



Name: Steels Creek

Acres: 5,841 acres

Description of Area

Location & Access

The Steels Creek area, located east of the Linville Gorge Wilderness in Burke County, lies within the Grandfather Ranger District on the Pisgah NF. The area is defined by NC State Route 181 (SR181) to the northeast, National Forest System Road 210A (NFSR 210A) to the southeast, Roses Creek Road (NFSR 210) to the south, NFSR 4077 to the southwest and New Ginger Cake Road (NFSR 496) to the northwest. Steels Creek Road, NFSR 228, extends into the area from the east side and is cherry-stemmed out of the area.

The area can be accessed by the Mountains to Sea Trail (NFST 440) which enters along the western border northeast of Table Rock Mountain. NFST 440 leads in a northeasterly direction toward NFSR 228, becomes coincident with Steels Creek Trail, NFST 237, and turns toward the northwest to generally follow along Steels Creek. This trail, NFST 237/440, then exits the area at New Ginger Cake Road (NFSR 496) along the boundary. Vehicular access is available via Steels Creek Road, NFSR 228, on the east side. NFSR 228 is a gated road that is locked from January 1 to April 1.

Surroundings

The area is entirely surrounded by national forest system lands. Brown Mountain Off-Highway Vehicle (OHV) Area is east of this section with the closest OHV trail about 1.5 miles from the southeastern border. Two commercial camping facilities on non-federal land lie just southeast of the area: Daniel Boone Family Campground and Steele Creek Park and Campground. There are also some residential properties near the Daniel Boone Family Campground.

Topography & Vegetation

The area is formed by a system of ridges and valleys generally dropping in elevation toward the southeast. Most of the area has steep and rugged terrain, especially near the higher ridges. Elevations range from about 3,100 feet at a high point along Lettered Rock Ridge near the western border to about 1,200 feet where Steels Creek flows out of the area on the eastern border.

The forest type is comprised of old growth forest and mature forest. Ecozones within the area include acidic cove, pine-oak/heath, and dry mesic oak. Recent management activities include shortleaf pine restoration. There are some fire-maintained habitats in the area and recent prescribed fire activities for pine-oak/heath as well as the shortleaf pine. This area includes over 1,000 acres of white pine dominated vegetation which is uncharacteristic vegetation in this area.

Current Uses

The area is managed primarily for timber and wildlife habitat. It is popular for hiking, hunting and fishing. Other uses in the area include backpacking, waterfall viewing, dispersed camping (along NFSR228), scenery, backcountry exploration, and forest product gathering. The area also has extensive use by special use permittees, often in large groups.

The area contains several linear wildlife openings and wildlife fields. Several old logging roads serve as linear wildlife openings and/or access routes for the mowing of wildlife fields. The area contains a large prescribed burn unit. Additionally, the area contains 13.3 miles of hiking trails, including the popular Mountains to Sea trail (NFST 440).

Evaluation of Wilderness Characteristics

Apparent Naturalness

About 120 acres within the area have been under timber management in the recent past with hundreds of acres more under management in prior decades. These treatments are substantially noticeable in several locations. Nonnative invasive species such as princess tree, occur along roads in the area.

There are approximately ten acres of maintained wildlife openings and fields dispersed throughout the area. The area is surrounded by roads with several old roadbeds in the interior of the area which are still evident today. Many of the old roads are currently used as access for mowing equipment to the wildlife fields and as connectors for trail systems. NFSR 228 extends into the area from the east for about two miles and is cherry-stemmed out of the area.

Opportunities for Solitude or Primitive & Unconfined Recreation

The area has opportunities for primitive recreation although popular hiking trails and sights and sounds of civilization from surrounding roads and lands diminish opportunities for solitude. The area's narrow arms and open road fragment the area and affect opportunities for primitive and unconfined recreation.

Along the southeastern border, sounds from the nearby Steele Creek Park and Campground can be heard. This campground includes RV camping, cabins, swimming pools, water slides, and miniature golf. The facility hosts an annual Grand National Cross Country race, an all-terrain vehicle racing event, on site. To the north and along the western border, popular destinations such as Brown Mountain Overlook, Linville Gorge trailheads (Sitting Bear, Hawksbill, Spence Ridge), and Tablerock Picnic Area also penetrate the area with sights and sounds of civilization. The very popular hiking trail, Mountains to Sea Trail /Steels Creek Trail (NFST 440/237) is within the area. In addition, several popular trails come to the border of the area to connect with this trail. These include Lower Steels Creek Trail, NFST 238, which connects to an old roadbed on the east side and Greentown Trail, NFST 268 which connects to the Mountains to Sea Trail immediately north of the border. Lower Steels Creek Trail and NFST 237/440 combine (via old NFSR 210A and NFSR 268) to form a scenic hike along Steels Creek, passing by cascades, swimming holes, and some unique waterfalls near the top of the ridge.

Other Values - Unique or Outstanding Qualities

Area streams and waterfalls, forests with old growth characteristics, and scenic values are some of the values that make this area special. The trail along Steels Creek, though popular, is rugged in places and provides a serene and unique hiking experience. Steels Creek offers many cascades, swimming holes, and waterfalls in the area. Along some of the more remote sections of the creek (i.e., not along the trail) waterfalls have formed with features such as "pot holes" (circular carved rock formations along the stream and below the falls) and a slide waterfall that takes a 90 degree turn through a narrow rock channel at the base.

Size & Manageability

At 5,841 acres, the Steels Creek area boundaries are irregular and surrounded by open roads and popular visitor destinations. The area boundary configuration creates narrow arms to the north, west, and south; most of which are less than a half mile in width. The sounds of the commercial camps and residential properties outside the area have impacts to solitude along the southeastern border.

Summary

Approximately 12% of the area has been managed in the last 40 years through timber harvest or maintenance of wildlife openings. These treatments are substantially noticeable in several locations and

adversely affect apparent naturalness. The area boundary configuration creates narrow arms to the north, west, and south; most of which are less than a half mile in width. The open NFS Road 228 further divides the area with a heavily used two mile corridor cutting deep into the area's interior. The narrow arms and open road fragment the area and affect opportunities for primitive and unconfined recreation. Solitude is also impacted by sights and sounds of NC181 to the east, dispersed camping along NFSR228, and a highly developed private campground to the south. This campground, which sits only 0.3 miles from area boundaries, hosts outdoor events and gatherings including motorcycle and ATV races.

Quantitative Summary of Items/Activities within the Steels Creek Area

Disclaimer: Information was generated from FS spatial datasets. All figures are approximate.

Description of Area	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Spruce-Fir Ecozone:	acres	0
Northern Hardwood Ecozone:	acres	0
High Elevation Red Oak Ecozone:	acres	0
Acidic Cove Ecozone:	acres	2,553.4
Rich Cove Ecozone:	acres	197.1
Mesic Oak Ecozone:	acres	84.2
Dry-Mesic Oak Ecozone:	acres	1,120.1
Dry Oak Ecozone:	acres	516.0
Pine-Oak/Heath Ecozone:	acres	1,187.1
Shortleaf Pine Ecozone:	acres	148.6
Alluvial Forest Ecozone:	acres	68.9

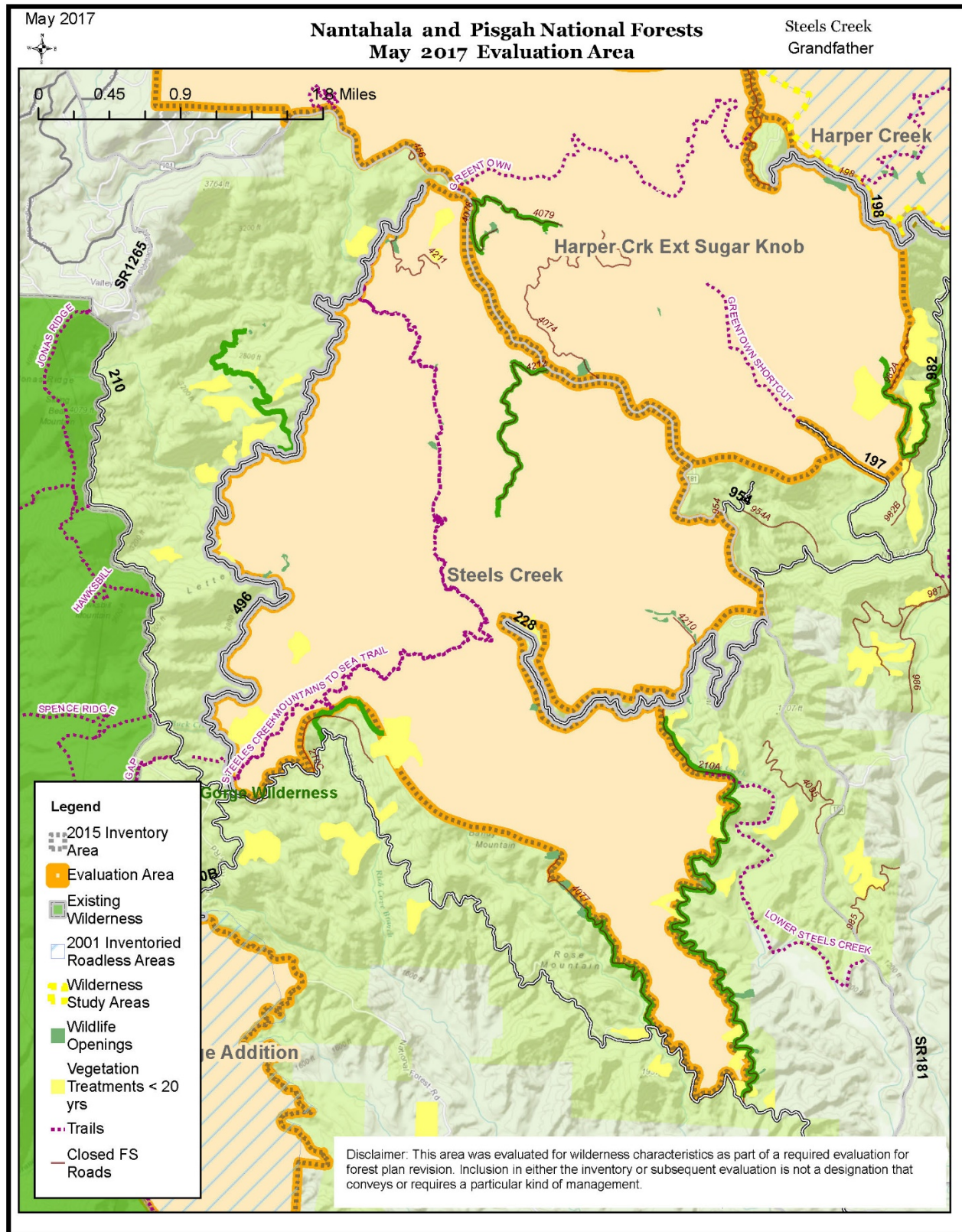
Apparent Naturalness	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Maintenance Level 1 National Forest System Roads:	miles	0
Closed Maintenance Level 2 National Forest System Roads:	miles	0
Road Stream Crossings, Bridge:	number	0
Road Stream Crossings, Other:	number	0
Trail Stream Crossings, Bridge:	number	0
Vegetation Management, 0-20 years old:	acres	119.5
Vegetation Management, 21-40 years old:	acres	554.2
Maintained Wildlife Fields (may overlap Bald Management Area):	acres	9.8
Existing Wilderness Study Area (WSA):	acres	0
Existing Inventoried Roadless Area (IRA may overlap WSA):	acres	0

Solitude or Primitive & Unconfined Recreation	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Current Backcountry Management Area (may overlap WSA & IRA):	acres	0
Inventoried Primitive Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) Setting:	acres	0
Inventoried Semi-Primitive Non-Motorized ROS Setting:	acres	626.6

	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Solitude or Primitive & Unconfined Recreation		
Inventoried Semi-Primitive Motorized ROS Setting (buffer of adjacent roads):	acres	817.6
Inventoried Roded Natural ROS Setting (buffer of adjacent roads):	acres	4,396.7
National Forest System Trail, Hike-only Allowed Use:	miles	13.3
National Forest System Trail, Hike-Bike Allowed Use:	miles	0
National Forest System Trail, Hike-Horse Allowed Use:	miles	0
National Forest System Trail, Hike-Bike-Horse Allowed Use:	miles	0

	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Unique & Outstanding Features		
Current Special Interest Management Area (scenic, geologic, botanical, zoological):	acres	0
Current Designated Wild & Scenic River Corridor (1/4 mile each side):	acres	0
Current Eligible Wild & Scenic River Corridor (1/4 mile each side):	acres	0
Research Natural Area:	acres	0

	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Size & Manageability		
Area, Total:	acres	5,840.9
Private/Non-Federal Inholdings, Total:	acres	0
Private/Non-Federal Inholdings, Count:	number	0
Outstanding or Reserved Subsurface Mineral Rights:	acres	0
Current Bald Management Area:	acres	0
Forest Research Plots, Count:	number	0



Name: Upper Wilson Creek Area

Acres: 6,372 acres

Description of Area

Location & Access

The Upper Wilson Creek area is split between Avery and Caldwell Counties, and is northwest of Mortimer, NC. It's located between NC1514 and Watauga Turnpike (NFSR45) to the east, NC1514 to the north, Roseboro-Gragg Road (NFSR192) and Roseboro-Edgemont Road (NFSR981) to the west, and NC90 and Roseboro-Edgemont Road to the south. The Blue Ridge Parkway and the Grandfather Mountain area is within a mile and half to the northern boundaries of the area. Access to the area is from several trailheads along Roseboro Gragg Road, NC1514, and Watauga Turnpike.

Surroundings

Area boundaries are generally consolidated, with one narrow arm of adjacent private land to the west off of NFSR4001, two protrusions to the south, and an irregular boundary in the northwest that follows Roseboro Road. Adjacent private land lies on the north/northeast boundary, the eastern boundary, the southern boundary, and the western boundary. There is one 77-acre private inholding in the area. The majority of the northern and eastern boundaries lie adjacent to National Forest System lands. Along Roseboro-Gragg and Roseboro-Edgemont Roads, immediately adjacent on the western boundary of the area, are the Old House Gap roadside campsites. Lost Cove Wilderness Study Area is adjacent to the Upper Wilson Creek area, separated by Roseboro-Edgemont Road. Gragg, an unincorporated community, is located north of the area.

Topography & Vegetation

The most prominent features in Upper Wilson Creek area are Wilson Creek, a Wild and Scenic River, and Yancey Ridge that resides above Wilson Creek. The elevation in the area ranges from 3,240 feet at Elk Park down to approximately 1,750 feet at Wilson Creek in the southern tip of the area. Much of the area surrounding Wilson Creek has steep and rugged terrain, with large boulders, cascading waterfalls, and dense vegetation. A broad range of ecozones are represented in the area, including acidic cove, rich cove, mesic oak, dry-mesic oak, dry oak, pine-oak/heath, and alluvial forest.

Current Uses

The area contains a range of dispersed recreation opportunities and forest management activities. Hiking and backpacking are popular, with several well established trails and road access surrounding the area. Fishing is popular in Wilson Creek and its tributaries, and the whitewater attracts many kayakers. There are popular mountain biking trails in the area surrounding the Upper Wilson Creek area. Public comments indicate that mountain biking opportunities in the area are highly valued by forest visitors.

Wilson Creek is a Wild and Scenic River, and approximately 1,630 acres of the Upper Wilson Creek area are within the designated Wild and Scenic River corridor. Approximately 3,326 acres are currently managed for a backcountry recreation experience. The area includes the 4,747 acre Wilson Creek Inventoried Roadless Area. The backcountry, Inventoried Roadless Area, and Wild and Scenic River corridor overlap one another and are concentrated around Wilson Creek. The area has extensive use by special use permittees, often in large groups.

The area contains 12 acres of currently managed wildlife openings, and two recent timber sales totaling approximately 41 acres that provide early successional habitat in the northwest corner of the area. The area also contains multiple landscape level prescribed burn units.

Evaluation of Wilderness Characteristics

Apparent Naturalness

Many locations within the Upper Wilson Creek area have a natural appearance, especially east of NSFR451; however, these forests have been logged in the past and contain recent vegetation and wildlife habitat management activities. There are several wildlife openings along the boundary, with the concentration of management on the west side. Two timber harvest areas are located on the northern tip of Yancey Ridge in the northwest corner of the area near Roseboro Road. These stands were cut within the last 20 years, and old roadbeds from past logging projects detract from naturalness in the area.

Marks Mountain Road (NSFR451), an open maintenance level 2 road, extends approximately 4.3 miles into the area between Hughes Ridge to the west and Yancey Ridge and is cherry-stemmed out of the area. To the east of this road, the area has a more natural appearance without any management activities or constructed features, aside from a series of hike-only trails and small wildlife openings along Watauga Turnpike on the eastern edge. The Upper Wilson Creek River corridor has significant infestations of the nonnative invasive plant, Japanese knotweed along approximately 2.5 miles, which is being actively treated for eradication.

Opportunities for Solitude or Primitive & Unconfined Recreation

Opportunities for solitude and for primitive recreation exist within the interior of the area. Sights and sounds of civilization are evident along many boundaries, which are largely along open roads, Opportunities for unconfined recreation are adversely affected by irregular boundaries and narrow arms, large inholdings and easements within the area, and the open NFR451 reaching 4.3 miles into the area's core. These features segment the area into smaller pieces, and limit where users can recreate without encountering roads or private lands.

Other Values - Unique or Outstanding Qualities

Wilson Creek, a Wild and Scenic River, is valued by recreation users for its outstanding whitewater, fishing opportunities, and scenic beauty. Massive boulders, cascading waterfalls, and plunge pools are frequent features along the river. Yancey Ridge rises steeply from Wilson Creek and forms the western part of the gorge.

Size & Manageability

The Wilson Creek Wild and Scenic River corridor comprises approximately 1,630 acres of the area, 4,747 acres are designated Inventoried Roadless Area, and approximately 3,326 acres are currently managed for backcountry recreation. The segment of Wilson Creek that passes through this area is primarily classified as wild.

The area is separated from the Lost Cove Wilderness Study Area by Roseboro-Edgemont Road (NFSR981), and other boundaries are almost entirely confined by open National Forest System roads and State roads. There is a private inholding and easement to the east of Wilson Creek, and an open road into the area to the west (NFSR451); both which affect manageability for wilderness characteristics of solitude and unconfined recreation. There are approximately 19 acres of outstanding or reserved subsurface mineral rights.

Summary

Parts of the Wilson Creek area are natural appearing, with much of it in an Inventoried Roadless Area, and a Wild and Scenic River corridor. However, other parts of the area have concentrations of recent timber harvest and maintained wildlife fields which detract from naturalness. Opportunities for solitude and primitive recreation exist within the core interior of the area; but irregular boundaries, a large private inholding and easement, and an open NFS road extending over four miles into the area adversely affect opportunities for solitude and unconfined recreation.

Quantitative Summary of Items/Activities within the Upper Wilson Creek Area

Disclaimer: Information was generated from FS spatial datasets. All figures are approximate.

Description of Area	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Spruce-Fir Ecozone:	acres	0
Northern Hardwood Ecozone:	acres	0
High Elevation Red Oak Ecozone:	acres	0
Acidic Cove Ecozone:	acres	1,993.4
Rich Cove Ecozone:	acres	356.4
Mesic Oak Ecozone:	acres	1,118.8
Dry-Mesic Oak Ecozone:	acres	170.5
Dry Oak Ecozone:	acres	861.1
Pine-Oak/Heath Ecozone:	acres	1,796.6
Shortleaf Pine Ecozone:	acres	8.0
Alluvial Forest Ecozone:	acres	123.6

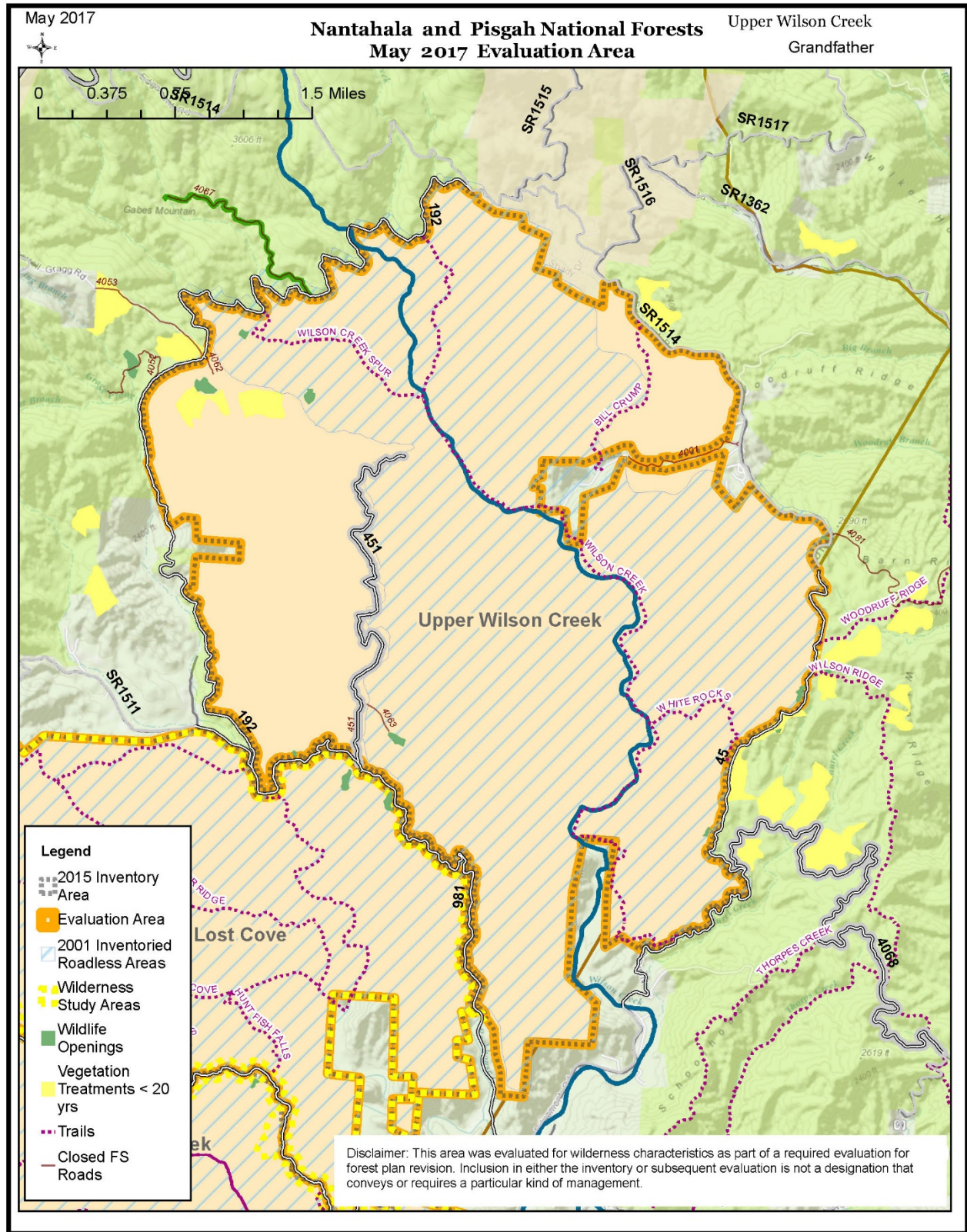
Apparent Naturalness	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Maintenance Level 1 National Forest System Roads:	miles	0.2
Closed Maintenance Level 2 National Forest System Roads:	miles	0.1
Road Stream Crossings, Bridge:	number	0
Road Stream Crossings, Other:	number	3
Trail Stream Crossings, Bridge:	number	0
Vegetation Management, 0-20 years old:	acres	41.1
Vegetation Management, 21-40 years old:	acres	0
Maintained Wildlife Fields (may overlap Bald Management Area):	acres	11.9
Existing Wilderness Study Area (WSA):	acres	0
Existing Inventoried Roadless Area (IRA may overlap WSA):	acres	4,747.0

Solitude or Primitive & Unconfined Recreation	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Current Backcountry Management Area (may overlap WSA & IRA):	acres	3,325.5
Inventoried Primitive Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) Setting:	acres	0
Inventoried Semi-Primitive Non-Motorized ROS Setting:	acres	1,437.7

	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Solitude or Primitive & Unconfined Recreation		
Inventoried Semi-Primitive Motorized ROS Setting (buffer of adjacent roads):	acres	1,909.4
Inventoried Roded Natural ROS Setting (buffer of adjacent roads):	acres	3,022.8
National Forest System Trail, Hike-only Allowed Use:	miles	8.9
National Forest System Trail, Hike-Bike Allowed Use:	miles	0
National Forest System Trail, Hike-Horse Allowed Use:	miles	0
National Forest System Trail, Hike-Bike-Horse Allowed Use:	miles	0

	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Unique & Outstanding Features		
Current Special Interest Management Area (scenic, geologic, botanical, zoological):	acres	0
Current Designated Wild & Scenic River Corridor (1/4 mile each side):	acres	1,629.7
Current Eligible Wild & Scenic River Corridor (1/4 mile each side):	acres	0
Research Natural Area:	acres	0

	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Size & Manageability		
Area, Total:	acres	6,372.3
Private/Non-Federal Inholdings, Total:	acres	77.0
Private/Non-Federal Inholdings, Count:	number	1
Outstanding or Reserved Subsurface Mineral Rights:	acres	18.8
Current Bald Management Area:	acres	0
Forest Research Plots, Count:	number	0



Name: Woods Mountain

Acres: 12,701 acres

Description of Area

Location & Access

The Woods Mountain area is on the Grandfather Ranger District of the Pisgah NF and is located in McDowell County, NC. Its west of the Woodlawn community, and east of the Blue Ridge Parkway and State Road 80. Woods Mountain area can be accessed by the BRP, SR80, SR1443, SR1440, and NFSR470. Trails in the area include the Woods Mountain Trail (aka. Mountains to Sea Trail), Harris Creek Trail, Armstrong Creek Trail, and the closed NFSR469 (which is used as a trail).

Surroundings

To the west is the Blue Ridge Parkway, and to the northeast are forested private lands. On the north side of Armstrong Creek are State lands and a fish hatchery, on the south side are national forest lands used for timber management. The boundary around Armstrong Creek and the State fish hatchery form a large exclusion from the area approximately two miles long and a mile wide. To the east and south are private lands with forested tracts and scattered residential/agricultural uses. Further to the east are US221, the community of Woodlawn, rock quarries, rock sorting yards, and other commercial developments. Little Buck Creek Road (NFSR470) is an open NFS road that enters from the south and is cherry-stemmed out of the area.

Topography & Vegetation

The Woods Mountain area is characterized by steep and rugged terrain. The area is formed by two prominent ridges with narrow creek valleys. The main ridges are the Blue Ridge which runs in a northeasterly direction, and the Woods Mountain ridge to the east. Armstrong Creek cuts through a narrow valley north of Woods Mountain. Elevations range from about 4,050 feet near Three Knobs along the Blue Ridge Parkway to about 1,600 feet along the southern boundary northeast of Lake Tahoma. The area contains some forests with old growth characteristics. Ecozones within the area include pine-oak/heath, mesic oak, acidic cove, rich cove. Fire-maintained habitats in the area include pine-oak/heath and mountain golden-heather habitat. The area includes some small 40 year-old white pine around the periphery, which is uncharacteristic vegetation in this area.

Current Uses

Approximately 83% of the area is currently managed for backcountry recreation and 73% is in the Woods Mountain Inventoried Roadless Area, which overlaps the backcountry management area. Other parts of the area are managed for timber and wildlife, and contain over nine acres of maintained wildlife fields and 260 acres of timber harvests ranging from 21-40 years old.

The Woods Mountain area contains a range of dispersed recreation opportunities, but its primary attractions are hiking, backpacking, mountain biking, horseback riding, hunting, and fishing. Most trails in the area are open to horse and mountain bike use, and when combined with NFS roads, provide a loop opportunity of over 26 miles. Mountain bike use has increased in the last few years at Woods Mountain and the area is now prized as a “backcountry” cycling experience. The area also has extensive use by special use permittees, such as outfitters and guides, often in large groups.

Evaluation of Wilderness Characteristics

Apparent Naturalness

Although parts of the Woods Mountain area have old growth characteristics, most of it has been logged in the past and evidence of old timber extraction routes are still evident today. The area also contains more recent timber harvest units from the last 40 years, NFS roads, a road bridge, and almost nine acres of maintained wildlife fields. These features detract from naturalness in their immediate vicinity.

Opportunities for Solitude or Primitive & Unconfined Recreation

Although the area has opportunities for solitude in many locations, sights and sounds of adjacent highways, the BRP, quarries, and commercial developments detract from solitude near area boundaries. From the high ridges, the town of Marion can be seen in the distance, and SR1443 and NFSR470 are open roads allowing vehicles into the area from the east and south. Solitude is also impacted by the high likelihood of visitor encounters with mountain bikers, and special use permit holders bringing large groups into the area.

Opportunities for primitive recreation are available across the area; however, with narrow arms of land along many area boundaries, the cherry-stemmed open NFS Road 470 entering from the south, a large exclusion along Armstrong Creek and SR1443 from the east, and mountain bike trails crossing through the area's core on Woods Mountain, opportunities for unconfined recreation are severely limited. These features tend to segment the area into smaller blocks, and confine recreation use to relatively small areas where roads or mountain bike trails would not be encountered.

Other Values - Unique or Outstanding Qualities

Although the Woods Mountain area is very scenic, it is not unique or outstanding within the context of the Southern Appalachian Mountains. The area includes the Woods Mountain/Singecat Ridge State Natural Heritage Area.

Size & Manageability

At 12,701 acres, the Woods Mountain area is of sufficient size to manage for preservation of wilderness characteristics. However, the irregular boundaries, irregular shape, cherry-stemmed open roads, and mountain bike trails divide the area into smaller segments.

Summary

With most of the Woods Mountain area managed as backcountry, many locations have apparent naturalness. However, area boundaries are irregular with many narrow arms, and the non-federal lands and open road along Armstrong Creek almost split the area in half. The larger portion, south of Armstrong Creek, is fragmented by mountain bike trails and an open NFS road. These features segment the area into smaller sections that limit opportunities for unconfined recreation across the area. Solitude is impacted by heavy trail use and the high likelihood of visitor encounters, including high potential of encounters with outfitter and guide groups that frequent the area.

Quantitative Summary of Items/Activities within the Woods Mountain Area

Disclaimer: Information was generated from FS spatial datasets. All figures are approximate.

Description of Area	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Spruce-Fir Ecozone:	acres	0
Northern Hardwood Ecozone:	acres	0.4
High Elevation Red Oak Ecozone:	acres	5.6
Acidic Cove Ecozone:	acres	2,734.8
Rich Cove Ecozone:	acres	2,115.0
Mesic Oak Ecozone:	acres	2,810.0
Dry-Mesic Oak Ecozone:	acres	588.8
Dry Oak Ecozone:	acres	747.7
Pine-Oak/Heath Ecozone:	acres	3,121.0
Shortleaf Pine Ecozone:	acres	548.4
Alluvial Forest Ecozone:	acres	26.4

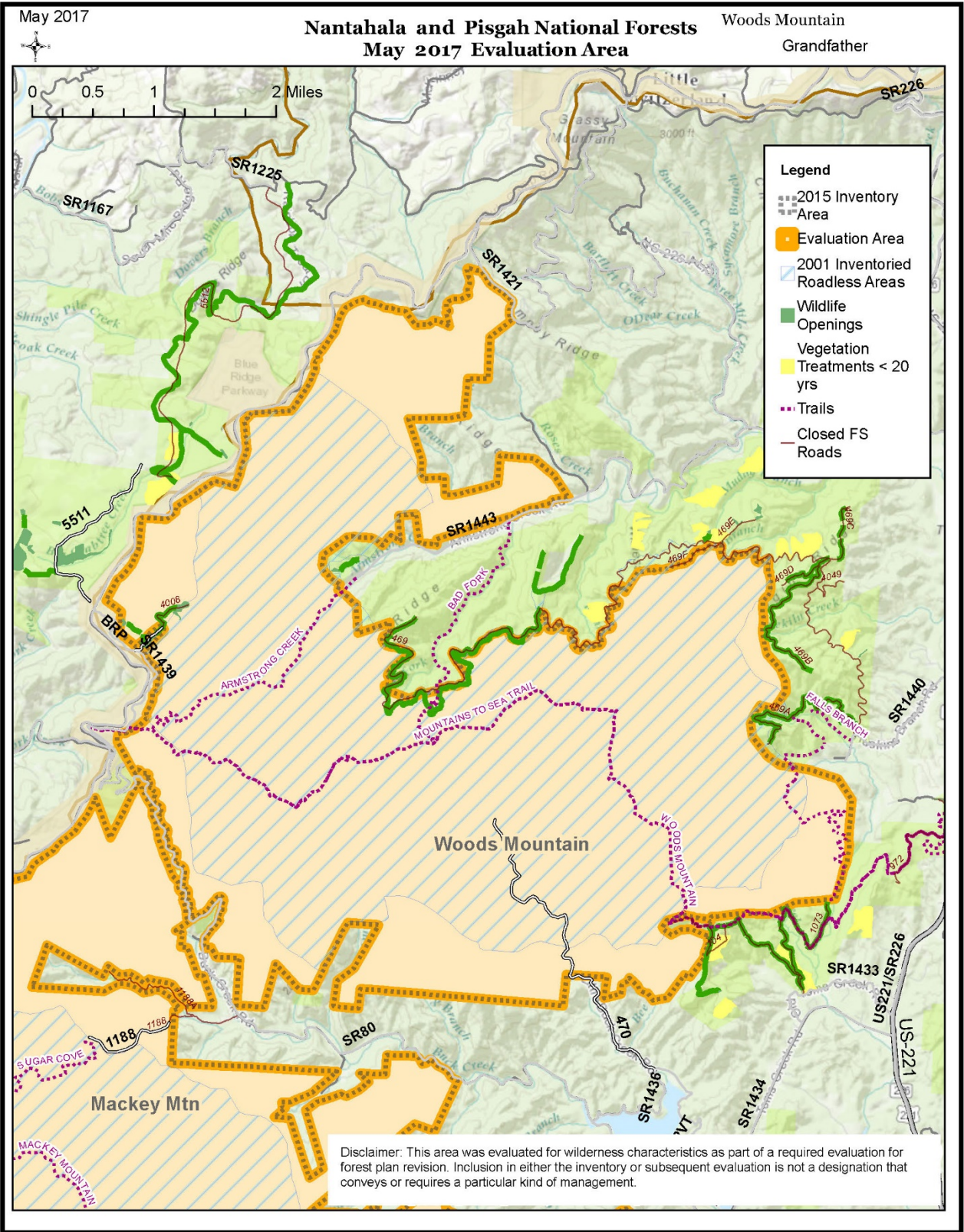
Apparent Naturalness	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Maintenance Level 1 National Forest System Roads:	miles	0.7
Closed Maintenance Level 2 National Forest System Roads:	miles	0.25
Road Stream Crossings, Bridge:	number	1
Road Stream Crossings, Other:	number	4
Trail Stream Crossings, Bridge:	number	0
Vegetation Management, 0-20 years old:	acres	0
Vegetation Management, 21-40 years old:	acres	259.8
Maintained Wildlife Fields (may overlap Bald Management Area):	acres	8.6
Existing Wilderness Study Area (WSA):	acres	0
Existing Inventoried Roadless Area (IRA may overlap WSA):	acres	9,329.5

Solitude or Primitive & Unconfined Recreation	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Current Backcountry Management Area (may overlap WSA & IRA):	acres	10,556.3
Inventoried Primitive Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) Setting:	acres	0
Inventoried Semi-Primitive Non-Motorized ROS Setting:	acres	4,998.4

	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Solitude or Primitive & Unconfined Recreation		
Inventoried Semi-Primitive Motorized ROS Setting (buffer of adjacent roads):	acres	2,578.8
Inventoried Roded Natural ROS Setting (buffer of adjacent roads):	acres	5,114.8
National Forest System Trail, Hike-only Allowed Use:	miles	9.9
National Forest System Trail, Hike-Bike Allowed Use:	miles	0
National Forest System Trail, Hike-Horse Allowed Use:	miles	0
National Forest System Trail, Hike-Bike-Horse Allowed Use:	miles	10.2

	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Unique & Outstanding Features		
Current Special Interest Management Area (scenic, geologic, botanical, zoological):	acres	0
Current Designated Wild & Scenic River Corridor (1/4 mile each side):	acres	0
Current Eligible Wild & Scenic River Corridor (1/4 mile each side):	acres	0
Research Natural Area:	acres	0

	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Size & Manageability		
Area, Total:	acres	12,700.7
Private/Non-Federal Inholdings, Total:	acres	0
Private/Non-Federal Inholdings, Count:	number	0
Outstanding or Reserved Subsurface Mineral Rights:	acres	0
Current Bald Management Area:	acres	0
Forest Research Plots, Count:	number	0



Nantahala Ranger District

Name: Southern Nantahala Wilderness Extension, East

Acres: 1,556 acres

Description of Area

Location & Access

Jan 2023 update: This area has been renamed Southern Nantahala Wilderness Extension, East. The Barkers Creek Southern Nantahala Wilderness Extension area is located in Macon County on the Nantahala Ranger District of the Nantahala NF. The area is between NC1104 to the south; and Cold Springs Gap Road (NFSR421A) and Dryman Fork Road (NFSR421) to the north. It is east of and adjacent to the Southern Nantahala Wilderness. Access into the area by trail is limited.

Surroundings

The northern boundary is generally smooth and borders National Forest System (NFS) lands while the southern boundary is highly irregular and borders non-federal land. The area is directly adjacent to the Southern Nantahala Wilderness to the west, completely adjacent to NFS lands to the north and east, and adjacent to private lands to the south with two exceptions. Two of the southern protrusions are adjacent to NC1104. Closed maintenance level 2 roads form borders along the north and eastern boundaries of the area.

Topography & Vegetation

The area is defined by a high ridgeline running east to west that forms the northern boundary and four ridges that branch off perpendicularly towards the south, including Brushy Ridge, Coldspring Gap Ridge, Long Ridge, and Pitch Knob/Deer Gap/High Knob Ridge. Elevations range from 4,650 feet on Brushy Ridge in the northwest down to approximately 2,500 feet where Barkers Creek exits the southern boundary of the area. Forest ecozones include acidic cove, rich cove, mesic oak, dry-mesic oak, pine-oak/heath, and shortleaf pine.

Current Uses

The Barkers Creek area includes approximately 967 acres of the Barkers Creek Inventoried Roadless Area which overlaps 1,396 acres of managed backcountry. Dispersed recreation opportunities may exist but there are no designated hiking trails in the area. Approximately 28 acres of vegetation management occurred on the eastern edge of the area 21-40 years ago.

Evaluation of Wilderness Characteristics

Apparent Naturalness

While much of this area was logged at the turn of the century, the Barkers Creek area has not been managed for vegetation or wildlife habitat within the last 40 years. Approximately 90 percent of the area is managed for remote backcountry and 967 acres comprise the Barkers Creek designated Inventoried Roadless Area. As a result of the lack of active forest management and current Inventoried Roadless Area and backcountry management, the majority of the area has a natural appearance. The large exclusion in the southeast is comprised of private lands and contains some built structures and a road which may detract from the contiguous naturalness of the eastern portion of the area.

Opportunities for Solitude or Primitive & Unconfined Recreation

Because there is limited access to the area, opportunities for solitude exist throughout much of the area. Sights and sounds of civilization may be apparent near the southwest protrusion into adjacent private land, the private exclusion in the east, and from the Cold Springs Gap (NFSR421A) and Dry Man Fork (NFSR421) roads to the north. Opportunities for primitive recreation include backcountry hiking, hunting, and fishing.

Other Values - Unique or Outstanding Qualities

The area has unique habitats and includes some forests with old growth characteristics in the eastern portion of the area. The high-elevation ridges that transect the area frame drainage basins for streams with brook trout habitat.

Size & Manageability

The Barkers Creek area contains 967 acres of Inventoried Roadless Area and 1,396 acres of backcountry management area. Area boundaries to the north, west, and east are consolidated except for three large protrusions and two large extrusions to the south, much of which is adjacent to private land. NC1104 is adjacent to portions of the southern boundary, two open NFS roads border the area to the north, and three closed NFS roads border the northeastern and eastern boundaries.

Summary

The Barkers Creek area is directly adjacent to the Southern Nantahala Wilderness and the majority of the area is comprised of Inventoried Roadless Area and backcountry management areas. The large extrusion in the east and subsequent sights and sounds of civilization may detract from naturalness and opportunities for solitude in the eastern most portion of the area. While this area is less than 5,000 acres, it is of sufficient size as to make practicable its preservation and use in an unimpaired condition because it is adjacent to an existing wilderness area.

Quantitative Summary of Items/Activities within the Barkers Creek SNW Extension D Area

Disclaimer: Information was generated from FS spatial datasets. All figures are approximate.

Description of Area	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Spruce-Fir Ecozone:	acres	0
Northern Hardwood Ecozone:	acres	0
High Elevation Red Oak Ecozone:	acres	11.8
Acidic Cove Ecozone:	acres	125.3
Rich Cove Ecozone:	acres	172.1
Mesic Oak Ecozone:	acres	816.7
Dry-Mesic Oak Ecozone:	acres	185.7
Dry Oak Ecozone:	acres	111.5
Pine-Oak/Heath Ecozone:	acres	121.8
Shortleaf Pine Ecozone:	acres	3.5
Alluvial Forest Ecozone:	acres	0

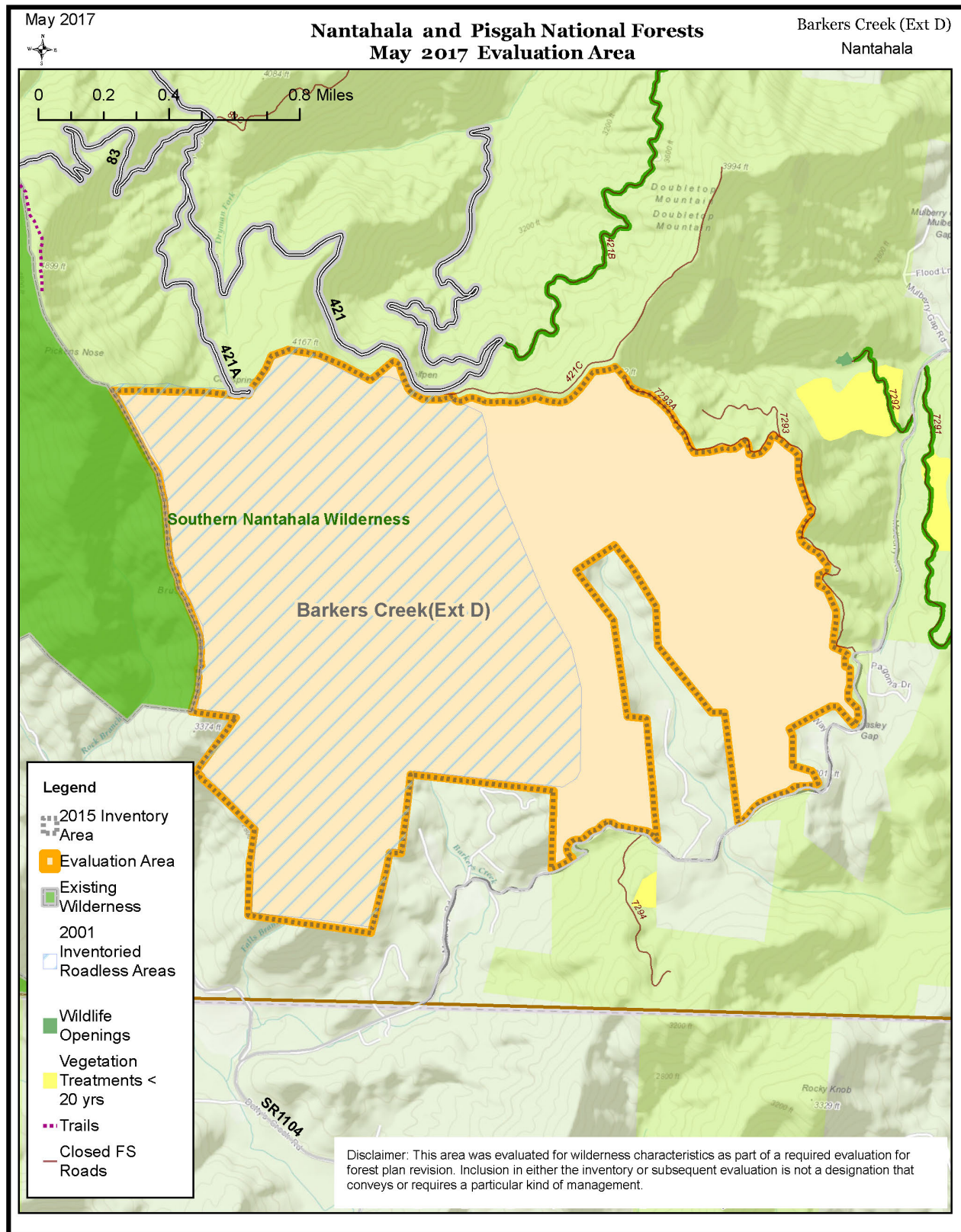
Apparent Naturalness	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Maintenance Level 1 National Forest System Roads:	miles	0
Closed Maintenance Level 2 National Forest System Roads:	miles	0.1
Road Stream Crossings, Bridge:	number	0
Road Stream Crossings, Other:	number	0
Trail Stream Crossings, Bridge:	number	0
Vegetation Management, 0-20 years old:	acres	0
Vegetation Management, 21-40 years old:	acres	27.8
Maintained Wildlife Fields (may overlap Bald Management Area):	acres	0
Existing Wilderness Study Area (WSA):	acres	0
Existing Inventoried Roadless Area (IRA may overlap WSA):	acres	967.0

Solitude or Primitive & Unconfined Recreation	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Current Backcountry Management Area (may overlap WSA & IRA):	acres	1,396.4
Inventoried Primitive Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) Setting:	acres	0

	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Solitude or Primitive & Unconfined Recreation		
Inventoried Semi-Primitive Non-Motorized ROS Setting:	acres	434.1
Inventoried Semi-Primitive Motorized ROS Setting (buffer of adjacent roads):	acres	144.0
Inventoried Roaded Natural ROS Setting (buffer of adjacent roads):	acres	971.7
National Forest System Trail, Hike-only Allowed Use:	miles	0
National Forest System Trail, Hike-Bike Allowed Use:	miles	0
National Forest System Trail, Hike-Horse Allowed Use:	miles	0
National Forest System Trail, Hike-Bike-Horse Allowed Use:	miles	0

	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Unique & Outstanding Features		
Current Special Interest Management Area (scenic, geologic, botanical, zoological):	acres	0
Current Designated Wild & Scenic River Corridor (1/4 mile each side):	acres	0
Current Eligible Wild & Scenic River Corridor (1/4 mile each side):	acres	0
Research Natural Area:	acres	0

	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Size & Manageability		
Area, Total:	acres	1556.0
Private/Non-Federal Inholdings, Total:	acres	0
Private/Non-Federal Inholdings, Count:	number	0
Outstanding or Reserved Subsurface Mineral Rights:	acres	0
Current Bald Management Area:	acres	0
Forest Research Plots, Count:	number	0



Name: Ellicott Rock West Extension

Acres: 824 acres

Description of Area

Location & Access

The Ellicott Rock West Extension is located on the Nantahala Ranger District in Macon County, NC, and is adjacent to Ellicott Rock Wilderness. The area can be accessed from the north off of SR 1607. Glade Trail and Ammons Branch Trail can be used to access the interior of the area.

Surroundings

The area is bordered by Ellicott Rock Wilderness on the east, Forest Service ownership on the north, and private ownership on the west. Ammons Branch campground is adjacent to the area on the northern side off of Bull Pen Road (NFSR 1178). Adjacent private lands are primarily forested with some pasture and residences. State and open FS roads border the area to the north and northwest.

Topography & Vegetation

This area consists of low elevation granitic domes ranging from 3,400 feet at the top of Chestnut Mountain to a low of approximately 2,600 feet on the western boundary. Ecozones represented in the area are predominantly dry oak and dry-mesic oak with lesser amounts of acidic cove, mesic oak, and pine oak/heath.

Current Uses

The area is managed primarily for wildlife, scenery, and recreation. It contains two trails in the central and northeastern portions of the area; one is designated as hike-only and the other is open to horseback riding, biking, and hiking. Hunting is also a popular activity in the area. There are recent vegetation management activities and mowed wildlife fields in the northwestern portion of the area. A portion of the area to the south has unidentified management direction because it was acquired after signing of the current Forest Plan.

Evaluation of Wilderness Characteristics

Apparent Naturalness

Recent vegetation management activities are apparent in the portion of the area northwest of Norton Branch. Areas east and south of Norton Branch have a natural appearing forest. An historic road extends through the area from Chestnut Mountain in the north to the southern boundary and on into Georgia; it is now used as part of the Glade Trail. There are no structures within the area, nor are the Glade Trail or Ammons Branch Trail highly developed.

Opportunities for Solitude or Primitive & Unconfined Recreation

Opportunities for solitude exist in the area primarily in the south and east near Ellicott Rock Wilderness. To the north and northwest, opportunities for solitude are diminished due to adjacent open roads and the developed FS Ammons Branch campground. Ammons Branch Trail is hike-only, while Glade Trail is open to horses, bikes, and hiking. Neither trail is heavily used.

Other Values - Unique or Outstanding Qualities

The area is part of the granitic dome geology extending from north Georgia to the Pisgah Ridge southwest of Asheville, NC. Although rock outcrops and cliffs are immediately adjacent to area boundaries, there are no notable geologic features within the area. There is diverse vegetation and wildlife within the area, but they are common within this forest type. There is one State Natural Heritage Area within the Ellicott Rock Extension Area.

Size & Manageability

If recommended, this area would be an extension on the west side of Ellicott Rock Wilderness. The western boundary is irregular and follows the Forest Service ownership and State Route 1608 along private lands. The northwestern portion has an irregular boundary with three narrow protrusions. The area east and south of Norton Creek are more conducive to managing for wilderness characteristics but is almost bisected by the Glade Trail. Approximately 88 acres have outstanding or reserved subsurface mineral rights. These mineral rights also extend into Ellicott Rock Wilderness. The area is known for its population of feral hogs, which have damaged resources and may require trapping or other control efforts.

Summary

Parts of the area to the east and south of Norton Creek have a natural appearance and opportunities for solitude and primitive recreation. Areas west of Norton Creek have a modified appearance, and diminished opportunities for solitude due to boundary configuration and proximity to open roads. While the area is part of the granitic dome geology, there are no notable geologic features within the area. The inventoried area's boundaries are irregular with three narrow protrusions; the areas east and south of Norton Creek are more conducive to managing for wilderness characteristics.

Quantitative Summary of Items/Activities within the Ellicott Rock West Extension Area

Disclaimer: Information was generated from FS spatial datasets. All figures are approximate.

Description of Area	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Spruce-Fir Ecozone:	acres	0
Northern Hardwood Ecozone:	acres	0
High Elevation Red Oak Ecozone:	acres	0
Acidic Cove Ecozone:	acres	141.5
Rich Cove Ecozone:	acres	0.6
Mesic Oak Ecozone:	acres	53.0
Dry-Mesic Oak Ecozone:	acres	265.8
Dry Oak Ecozone:	acres	336.6
Pine-Oak/Heath Ecozone:	acres	24.6
Shortleaf Pine Ecozone:	acres	0
Alluvial Forest Ecozone:	acres	0

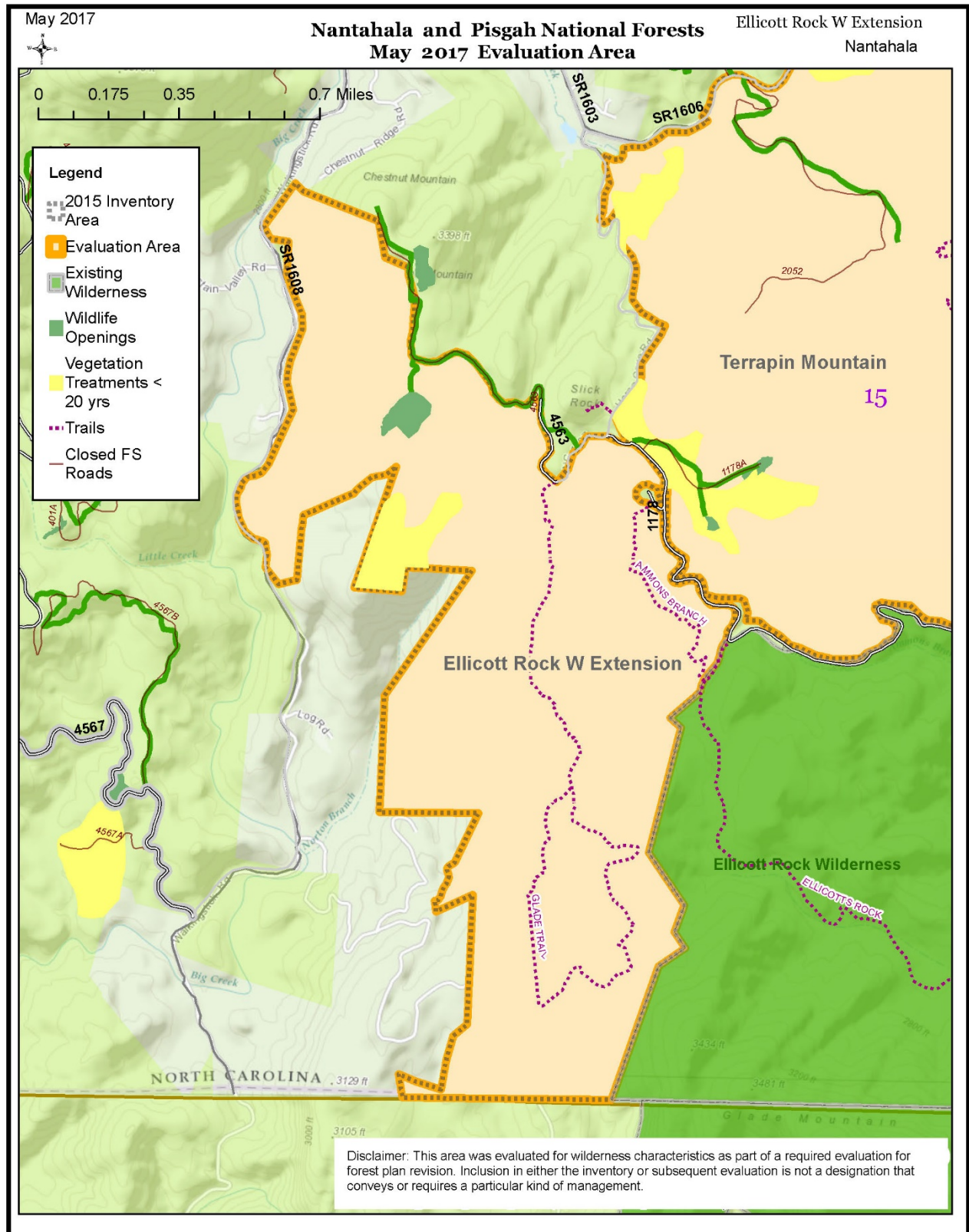
Apparent Naturalness	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Maintenance Level 1 National Forest System Roads:	miles	0
Closed Maintenance Level 2 National Forest System Roads:	miles	0.3
Road Stream Crossings, Bridge:	number	0
Road Stream Crossings, Other:	number	0
Trail Stream Crossings, Bridge:	number	0
Vegetation Management, 0-20 years old:	acres	46.6
Vegetation Management, 21-40 years old:	acres	0
Maintained Wildlife Fields (may overlap Bald Management Area):	acres	6.0
Existing Wilderness Study Area (WSA):	acres	0
Existing Inventoried Roadless Area (IRA may overlap WSA):	acres	0

Solitude or Primitive & Unconfined Recreation	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Current Backcountry Management Area (may overlap WSA & IRA):	acres	0
Inventoried Primitive Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) Setting:	acres	0

	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Solitude or Primitive & Unconfined Recreation		
Inventoried Semi-Primitive Non-Motorized ROS Setting:	acres	98.5
Inventoried Semi-Primitive Motorized ROS Setting (buffer of adjacent roads):	acres	0
Inventoried Roaded Natural ROS Setting (buffer of adjacent roads):	acres	724.9
National Forest System Trail, Hike-only Allowed Use:	miles	0.7
National Forest System Trail, Hike-Bike Allowed Use:	miles	0
National Forest System Trail, Hike-Horse Allowed Use:	miles	0
National Forest System Trail, Hike-Bike-Horse Allowed Use:	miles	2.5

	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Unique & Outstanding Features		
Current Special Interest Management Area (scenic, geologic, botanical, zoological):	acres	0
Current Designated Wild & Scenic River Corridor (1/4 mile each side):	acres	0
Current Eligible Wild & Scenic River Corridor (1/4 mile each side):	acres	0
Research Natural Area:	acres	0

	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Size & Manageability		
Area, Total:	acres	824.1
Private/Non-Federal Inholdings, Total:	acres	0
Private/Non-Federal Inholdings, Count:	number	0
Outstanding or Reserved Subsurface Mineral Rights:	acres	88.4
Current Bald Management Area:	acres	0
Forest Research Plots, Count:	number	0



Name: Fishhawk Mountain

Acres: 5,670 acres

Description of Area

Location & Access

The Fishhawk Mountain area, located about seven miles southeast of Franklin, NC, in Macon County, lies within the Nantahala Ranger District of the Nantahala NF. The area is dominated by the Fishhawk Mountain ridgeline.

The area may be accessed via the Bartram Trail (NFST67) which leads from the southern border to the western border. Vehicular access can be gained by a number of roads that lead into the area; Jones Gap Road (NFSR 4522) leads into the area from the east to a Bartram Trail parking area.

Surroundings

The shape of the area is very irregular with borders are surrounded by non-Forest Service lands. The overall shape of the area has many protrusions and exclusions with fingers and blocks of non-federal land extending up the slopes into the area. The non-federal lands are comprised mostly of residential properties with some commercial development further toward the west along US 441 as well as further to the east along US 64. From the higher points along the ridge, one can see the Otto Community in the Little Tennessee River valley to the west and the town of Highlands to the east.

Topography & Vegetation

This area is primarily formed by the Fishhawk Mountain Ridge; the slopes and ridge/valley systems that fall away from the dominant ridge line; and the massive open rock-face cliffs facing southwest. There are areas of steep and rugged terrain leading up to the ridge top with elevations ranging from about 2,400 feet near where Buckeye Creek flows out of the area on the western side to a high point of 4,748 feet at the top of Fishhawk Mountain.

Ecozones within the area include mesic oak, acidic cove, rich cove, and dry oak. Several rare species are found in the area including divided-leaf ragwort, granite dome goldenrod, shooting-star, American bittersweet, and cliff stonecrop, as well as one rare moss and one rare liverwort.

Current Uses

The Fishhawk Mountain area contains a range of recreation opportunities, but its primary attractions are hiking, backpacking, scenery, hunting, and fishing. The area contains nine miles of hiking trails. A section of the long-distance Bartram Trail along with two trailhead parking areas are also within the area.

The area contains linear wildlife fields and wildlife openings to support wildlife habitat. It also contains private-land inholdings with private road easements and residences.

Evaluation of Wilderness Characteristics

Apparent Naturalness

Evidence of road building and logging from the 1980s is apparent throughout much of the area. There are just over three miles of closed maintenance level 2 Forest Service roads in the area. There are three private inholdings in the area (covering 465 acres), one of which has a private road easement. Double Top Road, NFSR 4527 is a maintenance level 2 Forest Service road that accesses the western most private inholding through an existing easement. Buckeye Creek Road, NFSR 4525 is a maintenance level 2 Forest

Service road in the western portion of the area that is accessible by 4-wheel drive vehicles and is mowed annually as a linear wildlife opening. Jones Gap Road (NFSR 4522) is an open maintenance level 2 road in the eastern portion of the area with mowed wildlife fields off of it; this road creates a cherry-stemmed exclusion in the area and detracts from naturalness in the immediate vicinity.

Opportunities for Solitude or Primitive & Unconfined Recreation

The Fishhawk Mountain area provides some opportunities for solitude with rugged terrain and rich forest where the sights and sounds of civilization are absent; however, sights and sounds from adjacent roads and civilization have the potential to diminish these opportunities; particularly around the periphery and the areas adjacent to private inholdings.

The area contains nine miles of hiking trails, primarily the Bartram Trail (NFST 67). This section, from Jones Gap to Buckeye Creek, follows the main ridge of the Fishhawk Mountains, with spur trails leading to mountain top vistas. This is one of the most scenic sections of the Bartram Trail with camping sites, plentiful water, and opportunities for solitude and primitive recreation. The three highest peaks are Jones Knob, 4266 ft.; White Rock Mountain, 4480 ft.; and Big Fishhawk Mountain, 4348 ft. Big Fishhawk Mountain is accessed by a primitive and steep trail with a plaque dedicated to William Bartram; however, there is no scenic view from the mountain top. White Rock and Jones Gap have sheer rock sides to the south and west. White Rock has a year round scenic vista. There are road accessible trailheads and parking areas at Jones Gap (east side) and at Buckeye Creek (west side).

Other Values - Unique or Outstanding Qualities

This area contains a section of the Bartram Trail which has been established to honor naturalist William Bartram. The area offers outstanding scenic values, rare plant species, and a unique habitat of montane red cedar hardwood woodland. There are two State Natural Heritage Areas within this area. The rock cliffs along the west provide long distance views and nesting habitat for peregrine falcons.

Size & Manageability

Overall, the area has a very irregular ownership boundary and is almost entirely surrounded by non-Forest Service lands. Residential property falls very close to area borders which would make manageability for solitude difficult along the periphery.

Approximately 105 acres of the Fishhawk Mountain area have outstanding or reserved subsurface mineral rights.

Summary

Apparent naturalness of the area is impacted by existing roads, residential property around the perimeter and within the interior (inholdings), and maintained wildlife fields. The area contains evidence of past and current human modification with 3.3 miles of roads and 465 acres of private, non-federal inholdings and their associated access rights-of-ways. Opportunities for solitude or primitive and unconfined recreation are impacted by the fragmented ownership as well as sights and sounds from development surrounding the area.

Quantitative Summary of Items/Activities within the Fishhawk Mountain Area

Disclaimer: Information was generated from FS spatial datasets. All figures are approximate.

Description of Area	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Spruce-Fir Ecozone:	acres	9.4
Northern Hardwood Ecozone:	acres	2.1
High Elevation Red Oak Ecozone:	acres	352.8
Acidic Cove Ecozone:	acres	1,502.6
Rich Cove Ecozone:	acres	767.4
Mesic Oak Ecozone:	acres	1,912.1
Dry-Mesic Oak Ecozone:	acres	208.7
Dry Oak Ecozone:	acres	476.7
Pine-Oak/Heath Ecozone:	acres	405.4
Shortleaf Pine Ecozone:	acres	17.2
Alluvial Forest Ecozone:	acres	0

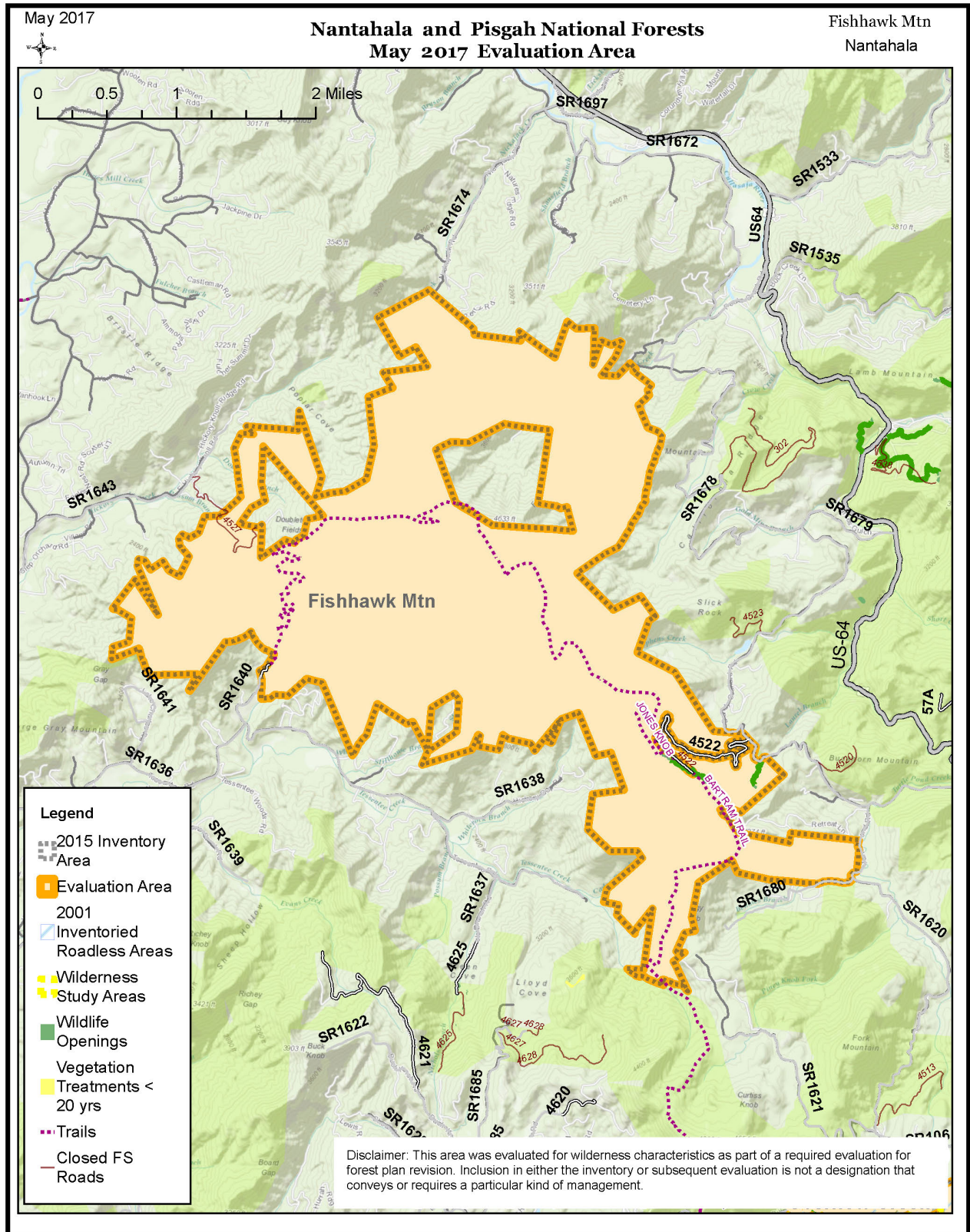
Apparent Naturalness	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Maintenance Level 1 National Forest System Roads:	miles	0
Closed Maintenance Level 2 National Forest System Roads:	miles	3.3
Road Stream Crossings, Bridge:	number	0
Road Stream Crossings, Other:	number	0
Trail Stream Crossings, Bridge:	number	0
Vegetation Management, 0-20 years old:	acres	0
Vegetation Management, 21-40 years old:	acres	172.2
Maintained Wildlife Fields (may overlap Bald Management Area):	acres	1.6
Existing Wilderness Study Area (WSA):	acres	0
Existing Inventoried Roadless Area (IRA may overlap WSA):	acres	0

Solitude or Primitive & Unconfined Recreation	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Current Backcountry Management Area (may overlap WSA & IRA):	acres	0
Inventoried Primitive Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) Setting:	acres	0
Inventoried Semi-Primitive Non-Motorized ROS Setting:	acres	2,227.3

	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Solitude or Primitive & Unconfined Recreation		
Inventoried Semi-Primitive Motorized ROS Setting (buffer of adjacent roads):	acres	55.8
Inventoried Roded Natural ROS Setting (buffer of adjacent roads):	acres	3,386.3
National Forest System Trail, Hike-only Allowed Use:	miles	9.0
National Forest System Trail, Hike-Bike Allowed Use:	miles	0
National Forest System Trail, Hike-Horse Allowed Use:	miles	0
National Forest System Trail, Hike-Bike-Horse Allowed Use:	miles	0

	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Unique & Outstanding Features		
Current Special Interest Management Area (scenic, geologic, botanical, zoological):	acres	0
Current Designated Wild & Scenic River Corridor (1/4 mile each side):	acres	0
Current Eligible Wild & Scenic River Corridor (1/4 mile each side):	acres	0
Research Natural Area:	acres	0

	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Size & Manageability		
Area, Total:	acres	5,669.5
Private/Non-Federal Inholdings, Total:	acres	464.6
Private/Non-Federal Inholdings, Count:	number	3
Outstanding or Reserved Subsurface Mineral Rights:	acres	105.4
Current Bald Management Area:	acres	0
Forest Research Plots, Count:	number	0



Name: Overflow Creek

Acres: 3,901 acres

Description of Area

Location & Access

Overflow Creek area is in Macon County southwest of Highlands, North Carolina; and is on the Nantahala Ranger District of the Nantahala National Forest. State Road (SR) 106 is to the north, National Forest System (NFS) Road 79C is to the east, and the North Carolina-Georgia State line is to the south. There are several NFS trails accessing the area, including Glen Falls Trail and Bartram National Recreation Trail. State Road 1618 provides access to Glen Falls Trailhead. National Forest System Road 79 is an open road extending into the area, and provides access to Hurrah Ridge Trailhead. (Note: NFSR79 is “cherry-stemmed” and excluded from area acreage.)

Surroundings

The Overflow Creek area borders the Chattahoochee NF in Georgia to the south and the Blue Valley Experimental Forest to the east. Adjacent lands on the Chattahoochee NF are managed to restore historical plant associations and their ecological dynamics to ecologically appropriate locations. To the west and northeast are residential developments, and much of the area can be seen from NC Highway 106 which runs along the slope above the northern boundary. On the northern side, adjacent to SR106, is a utility transmission line which passes through a portion of the Overflow Creek area.

Topography & Vegetation

The Overflow Creek area is a basin for the headwaters of West Fork Overflow Creek. The surrounding high ridges and cliffs are predominately in private ownership with housing developments overlooking the basin, known as Blue Valley. Elevations range from 2,500 feet in the valley, to over 4,000 feet on the cliffs above. The many rock outcrops and cliffs are metamorphic biotite schists and gneisses estimated to be over 570 million years old. Just as this topography allows views from the roads, scenic overlooks, and residences perched high above the valley, it also allows views of surrounding development from many places within the area; this is especially true in leaf-off season. Vegetation in the area varies with aspect and elevation, but is primarily acidic cove, mesic oak, dry oak, and pine oak/heath ecozones, with stands of white pine.

Current Uses

Approximately 86% of the Overflow Creek area was designated as a Wilderness Study Area (WSA) in 1984, but the area was not recommended for wilderness designation in the 1987 Nantahala and Pisgah National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan. Although no timber management activities have occurred in the WSA since designation, there are maintained wildlife fields within the boundaries.

Recreation use in the area includes hiking, backpacking, horseback riding (on NFS roads), waterfall viewing, hunting, and fishing. All area trails are managed as hike-only, including Bartram National Recreation Trail, Hurrah Ridge Trail, West Fork Trail, Chinquapin Trail, and Glen Falls Trail.

Evaluation of Wilderness Characteristics

Apparent Naturalness

With high elevation rock outcrops, cliffs, waterfalls and old growth forests, much of the Overflow Creek area has natural appearing forests, and has not had any timber management since its designation as a

Wilderness Study Area in 1984. However, within the evaluation area there are over 40 acres of timber harvest ranging from 21-40 years old; these are in the southwest portion outside the WSA. There are also approximately 11 acres of currently maintained wildlife fields within a portion of the area which overlaps the WSA. Glen Falls is a major attraction in the area with a highly developed trail and observation platforms along the multi-tiered waterfall. The Glen Falls Trail and wildlife fields detract from the area's naturalness in the central and northeastern portions of the area; however, these impacts are not pervasive throughout the entire area. There is a cleared utility transmission line that transects the far northeastern edge of this area; however, impacts from this transmission line are limited to the immediate vicinity and not pervasive throughout the area.

Opportunities for Solitude or Primitive & Unconfined Recreation

Although there are places within Overflow Creek area that provide opportunities for solitude, sights and sounds of adjacent highways, residential developments, and high visitor use at Glen Falls negatively affect those opportunities in their respective location. Most of the adjacent development sits high above the valley, with exposure to many locations within the area. Additionally, NFSR79 is an open road that extends into the area for almost two miles, and there are several maintained wildlife fields in the area. Although not pervasive across the entire area, sights and sounds of vehicles are evident along NC106, NFSR79, and occasionally from equipment maintaining wildlife fields.

Opportunities for primitive recreation exist throughout the area, and the area is popular for hiking, backpacking, waterfall viewing, hunting, and fishing. However, NFSR79 nearly bisects the area and limits opportunities for unconfined recreation. When considered with the relatively small size of the area, this open road creates a situation where there is almost no part of the area more than 1.3 miles from an open road or boundary. In fact, the distances between boundaries, or NFSR79 and a boundary are typically one mile or less.

Other Values - Unique or Outstanding Qualities

There are high elevation rock outcrops, cliffs, and waterfalls within the area, as well as forests with old growth characteristics. Overflow Creek flows through the area and is a tributary to the Chattooga River, which is a designated Wild and Scenic River. The 120 acre designated Glen Falls Scenic Area is within this area and is managed for protection and enhancement of the scenic resource. Glen Falls also supports a unique "spray cliff" habitat for several species of mosses and liverworts. There are three State Natural Heritage Areas located in the Overflow Creek area.

Size & Manageability

At 3,901 acres, Overflow Creek area is smaller than the stand-alone area size usually considered practicable for preservation and use in an unimpaired condition. The area is further divided by an open road, which nearly bisects it and negatively affects opportunities for unconfined recreation across the area. The area is contiguous with the Blue Valley Experimental Forest to the east and the Chattahoochee NF to the south.

Summary

The Overflow Creek area has been managed as a Wilderness Study Area for the last 33 years and has remarkable geology, scenic vistas, and rich biodiversity. At only 3,901 acres, the Overflow Creek area is effectively bisected by open road NFSR79 which adversely affects manageability as wilderness and opportunities for unconfined recreation. Highly developed trail structures and maintained wildlife openings detract from apparent naturalness in the northeastern and central portions of the area; however, these impacts are largely confined to the immediate vicinity and are not pervasive throughout

the area. Impacts to solitude from sights and sounds of surrounding development include NC106 and NFSR79, as well as a high likelihood of visitor encounters given the highly visited area waterfalls and proximity to nearby resort communities just north of the area.

Quantitative Summary of Items/Activities within the Overflow Creek Area

Disclaimer: Information was generated from FS spatial datasets. All figures are approximate.

Description of Area	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Spruce-Fir Ecozone:	acres	0
Northern Hardwood Ecozone:	acres	0.1
High Elevation Red Oak Ecozone:	acres	40.4
Acidic Cove Ecozone:	acres	1,516.3
Rich Cove Ecozone:	acres	21.5
Mesic Oak Ecozone:	acres	650.6
Dry-Mesic Oak Ecozone:	acres	375.9
Dry Oak Ecozone:	acres	609.6
Pine-Oak/Heath Ecozone:	acres	680.9
Shortleaf Pine Ecozone:	acres	1.9
Alluvial Forest Ecozone:	acres	0.2

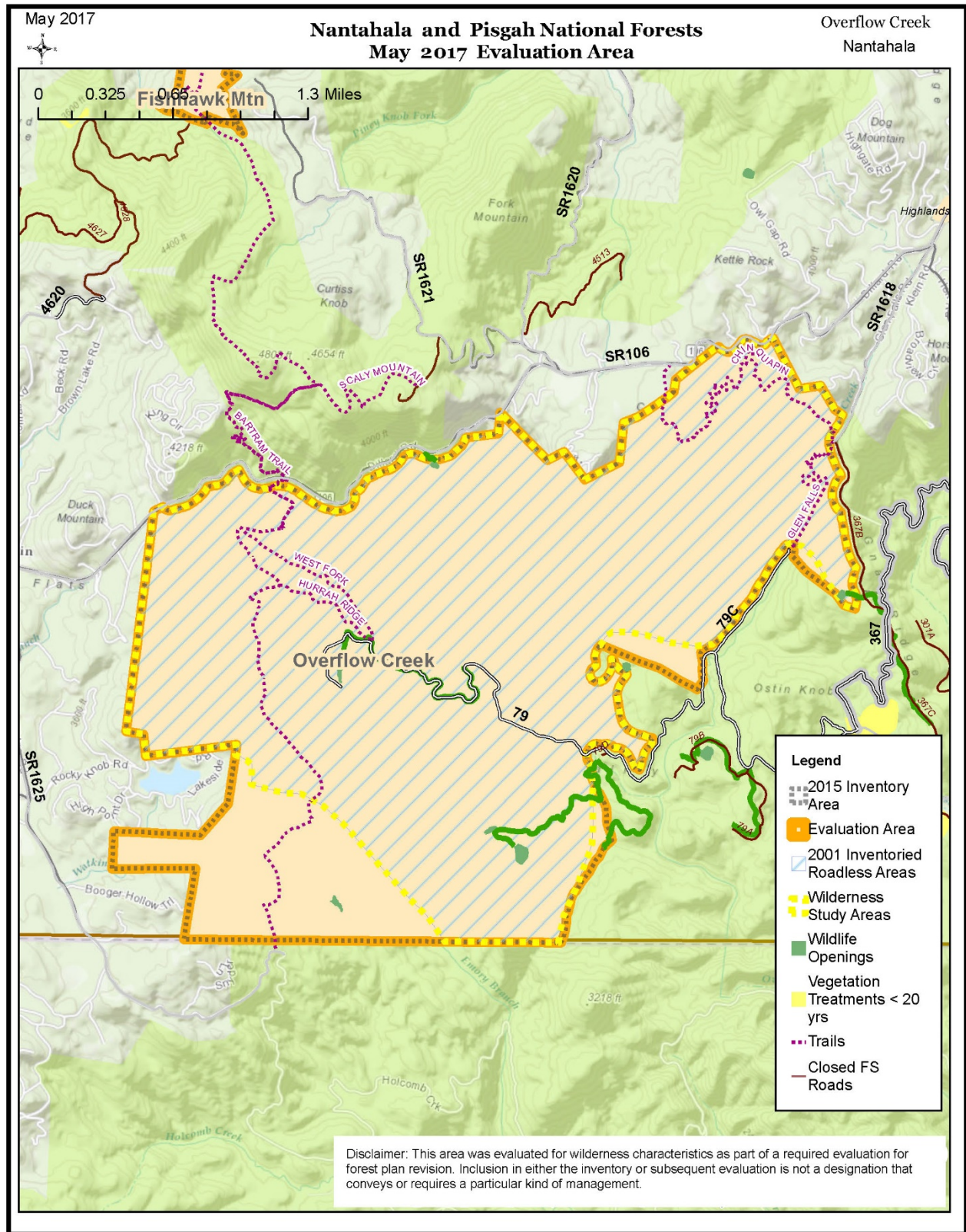
Apparent Naturalness	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Maintenance Level 1 National Forest System Roads:	miles	0
Closed Maintenance Level 2 National Forest System Roads:	miles	0
Road Stream Crossings, Bridge:	number	0
Road Stream Crossings, Other:	number	2
Trail Stream Crossings, Bridge:	number	12
Vegetation Management, 0-20 years old:	acres	0
Vegetation Management, 21-40 years old:	acres	41.3
Maintained Wildlife Fields (may overlap Bald Management Area):	acres	10.9
Existing Wilderness Study Area (WSA):	acres	3,376.8
Existing Inventoried Roadless Area (IRA may overlap WSA):	acres	3,376.8

Solitude or Primitive & Unconfined Recreation	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Current Backcountry Management Area (may overlap WSA & IRA):	acres	3,400.5
Inventoried Primitive Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) Setting:	acres	0
Inventoried Semi-Primitive Non-Motorized ROS Setting:	acres	982.8

	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Solitude or Primitive & Unconfined Recreation		
Inventoried Semi-Primitive Motorized ROS Setting (buffer of adjacent roads):	acres	0
Inventoried Roaded Natural ROS Setting (buffer of adjacent roads):	acres	2,918.1
National Forest System Trail, Hike-only Allowed Use:	miles	7.9
National Forest System Trail, Hike-Bike Allowed Use:	miles	0
National Forest System Trail, Hike-Horse Allowed Use:	miles	0
National Forest System Trail, Hike-Bike-Horse Allowed Use:	miles	0

	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Unique & Outstanding Features		
Current Special Interest Management Area (scenic, geologic, botanical, zoological):	acres	0
Current Designated Wild & Scenic River Corridor (1/4 mile each side):	acres	0
Current Eligible Wild & Scenic River Corridor (1/4 mile each side):	acres	0
Research Natural Area:	acres	0

	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Size & Manageability		
Area, Total:	acres	3901.0
Private/Non-Federal Inholdings, Total:	acres	0
Private/Non-Federal Inholdings, Count:	number	0
Outstanding or Reserved Subsurface Mineral Rights:	acres	0
Current Bald Management Area:	acres	0
Forest Research Plots, Count:	number	0



Name: Panthertown Valley

Acres: 4,395 acres

Description of Area

Location & Access

The Panthertown Valley area is located in Jackson County within the Nantahala Ranger District of the Nantahala NF and lies between NC1301 to the east, NC1121 to the west, and US64 to the south. A dense network of trails exists within the area, and main access points are from NC1301 and NC1121.

Surroundings

The area boundary is irregular with the exception of the southeast boundary which follows a cleared utility powerline corridor. The western boundary is adjacent to non-federal land and is defined by open roads and the Forest Service ownership boundary. With the exception of a few small areas, the entire area is adjacent to private or non-federal land. Closed maintenance level 1 and 2 NFS roads are found along the northern and eastern borders of the area.

Topography & Vegetation

Panthertown Valley is defined by a series of mountains with sheer granite cliffs that give way to valleys below. The most prominent features of the area include the Big Green Mountain, Goldspring Ridge, Little Green Mountain, and Black Rock Mountain. Elevations range from 4,777 feet at Toxaway Mountain in the southern tip of the area down to approximately 3,450 feet where the Tuckasegee River exits the area. Forest ecozones include high elevation red oak, acidic cove, mesic oak, dry-mesic oak, and dry oak. There is a large white pine plantation in the valley below Little Green Mountain.

Current Uses

The Panthertown Valley area contains a wide range of dispersed recreation opportunities. Hunting and fishing are popular in the area with easy access, ample water resources, and maintained wildlife openings. A camping shelter is located off the Great Wall trail below Big Green Mountain and a historic house and barn are found in the Poplar Mountain Area. There are rock climbing routes on the granite faces that define Panthertown Valley, and an extensive network of trails for hiking, mountain biking, and horseback riding that are popular destinations for many visitors. Toxaway Mountain in the southern tip of the area has a lookout tower.

The entire area is currently managed as backcountry. A vast network of trails and Duke Energy road easements exist within the area, and main access points are from NC1301 and NC1121. The Property was acquired from Progress Energy (Duke Power) and Progress Energy has legal right-of-way across 10 miles of road for vehicle access, which is currently used as a trail.

Evaluation of Wilderness Characteristics

Apparent Naturalness

Purchased in 1989 from private hands, this area has been logged in the past and there is a white pine plantation below Little Green Mountain. Toxaway Mountain, the highest peak in the area, has a lookout tower on top. There is also a large network of heavily used trails that are open to hiking, mountain biking, and horseback riding. Along the entire eastern boundary is a transmission powerline corridor which is visible from different parts of the area. These features all contribute to a departure from naturalness in the area.

Opportunities for Solitude or Primitive & Unconfined Recreation

While opportunities for solitude exist in the interior of the area away from popular recreation areas, there are many miles of heavily used trails that are open to hiking, biking, and horseback riding and encounters with other forest visitors are common. There are many opportunities for primitive recreation in the area. The network of valleys contains several streams that attract anglers, and waterfalls and plunge pools are popular destinations for hikers. Granite rock outcrops attract rock climbers and hikers, and close to 15 miles of trail are open for equestrian use.

Other Values - Unique or Outstanding Qualities

Panthertown Valley has many geologic and hydrologic qualities, including granite faces that tower above valleys with streams and waterfalls. These qualities combined with a large network of trails, attract a large number of visitors each year.

Size & Manageability

At 4,395 acres, the Panthertown Valley area may not be of sufficient size to practically manage its preservation and use in an unimpaired condition and is bordered on two sides by residential property. The area boundaries are irregular except for the eastern boundary which is adjacent to a utility powerline corridor.

Summary

Heavy recreational use and an extensive network of trails impact opportunities for solitude across this area. Past human modification is evident and there are maintained wildlife openings and a lookout tower. There are approximately ten miles of roads in the area used to access the adjacent transmission line by Progress Energy which impact the naturalness of the area. The area's size and relationship to adjacent private lands reduces the ability to practically manage its preservation in an unpaired condition.

Quantitative Summary of Items/Activities within the Panthertown Valley Area

Disclaimer: Information was generated from FS spatial datasets. All figures are approximate.

Description of Area	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Spruce-Fir Ecozone:	acres	38.5
Northern Hardwood Ecozone:	acres	100.8
High Elevation Red Oak Ecozone:	acres	629.0
Acidic Cove Ecozone:	acres	2,491.2
Rich Cove Ecozone:	acres	23.8
Mesic Oak Ecozone:	acres	250.4
Dry-Mesic Oak Ecozone:	acres	432.8
Dry Oak Ecozone:	acres	337.1
Pine-Oak/Heath Ecozone:	acres	44.9
Shortleaf Pine Ecozone:	acres	0
Alluvial Forest Ecozone:	acres	80.9

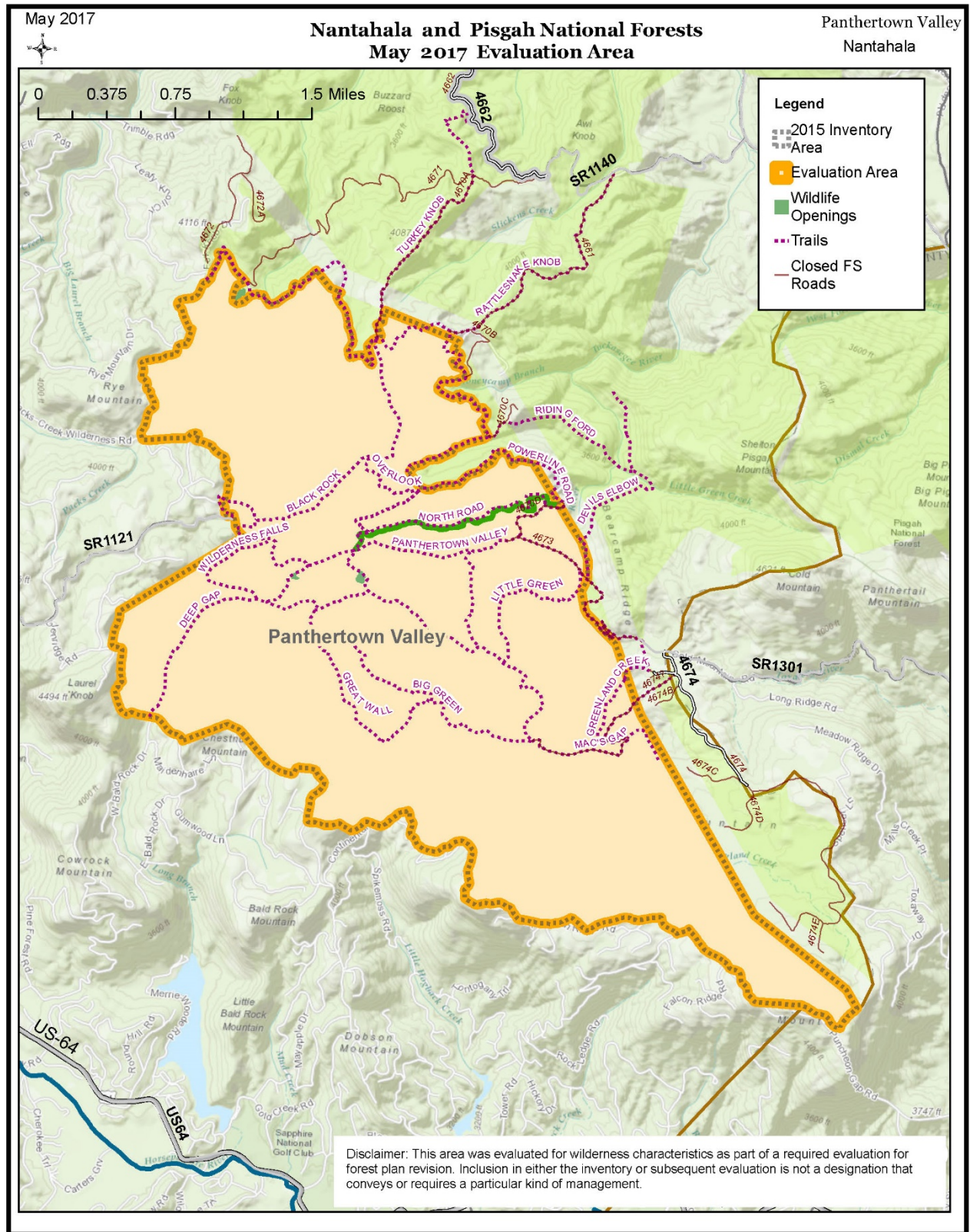
Apparent Naturalness	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Maintenance Level 1 National Forest System Roads:	miles	1.1
Closed Maintenance Level 2 National Forest System Roads:	miles	0
Road Stream Crossings, Bridge:	number	0
Road Stream Crossings, Other:	number	4
Trail Stream Crossings, Bridge:	number	3
Vegetation Management, 0-20 years old:	acres	0
Vegetation Management, 21-40 years old:	acres	0
Maintained Wildlife Fields (may overlap Bald Management Area):	acres	4.7
Existing Wilderness Study Area (WSA):	acres	0
Existing Inventoried Roadless Area (IRA may overlap WSA):	acres	0

Solitude or Primitive & Unconfined Recreation	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Current Backcountry Management Area (may overlap WSA & IRA):	acres	4,361.0
Inventoried Primitive Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) Setting:	acres	0
Inventoried Semi-Primitive Non-Motorized ROS Setting:	acres	1,922.2

	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Solitude or Primitive & Unconfined Recreation		
Inventoried Semi-Primitive Motorized ROS Setting (buffer of adjacent roads):	acres	911.5
Inventoried Roded Natural ROS Setting (buffer of adjacent roads):	acres	1,561.2
National Forest System Trail, Hike-only Allowed Use:	miles	6.0
National Forest System Trail, Hike-Bike Allowed Use:	miles	0
National Forest System Trail, Hike-Horse Allowed Use:	miles	3.0
National Forest System Trail, Hike-Bike-Horse Allowed Use:	miles	11.9

	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Unique & Outstanding Features		
Current Special Interest Management Area (scenic, geologic, botanical, zoological):	acres	0
Current Designated Wild & Scenic River Corridor (1/4 mile each side):	acres	0
Current Eligible Wild & Scenic River Corridor (1/4 mile each side):	acres	0
Research Natural Area:	acres	0

	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Size & Manageability		
Area, Total:	acres	4394.9
Private/Non-Federal Inholdings, Total:	acres	0
Private/Non-Federal Inholdings, Count:	number	0
Outstanding or Reserved Subsurface Mineral Rights:	acres	0
Current Bald Management Area:	acres	0
Forest Research Plots, Count:	number	0



Name: Siler Bald

Acres: 6,280 acres

Description of Area

Location & Access

The Siler Bald area, in Macon County, is located in the Nantahala Ranger District on the Nantahala NF. The area is surrounded by roads: Wayah Road (SR 1310) to the north, Boardtree Road, NFSR 388 to the northeast, US 64 to the southeast, Moore Creek Road, NFSR 7131 to the south, and Rainbow Springs Road, NFSR 437 to the southwest. Access to the area can be gained from a number of closed maintenance level 1 and 2 (ML1, ML2) Forest Service roads, many of which are maintained as linear wildlife openings: NFSR 388B, 388D, 437A, 7131A, 7131D, 7131E, 7131G, 7280, 7280A, 7980A1, 7280B, 7280C, 7283, 7283A. The Appalachian Trail comes in at the southeastern corner of the area off of US 64 and runs in a northerly direction.

Surroundings

The area boundaries are irregular and primarily follow open Forest Service roads and state roads. The area is adjacent to National Forest System lands on most borders; the exceptions being sections along the southwest border and the northern border.

Immediate surroundings include numerous Forest Service system roads, the Nantahala River, which forms a portion of the southwestern border along NFSR 437, farms and residential areas near the southeast, southwest, and northeast sections, high-traffic highways (US 64 to the southeast and SR 1310 to the north), and Dirty John shooting range which lies to the north, across SR 1310, but within hearing distance.

Franklin, NC, is about 12 miles to the east; Standing Indian Mountain and the Southern Nantahala Wilderness are located to the south; the Tusquitee Mountains are to the west; Nantahala Lake is to the northwest; and Wayah Bald is located north of the area.

Topography & Vegetation

The Siler Bald area, along one of the predominant ridgelines of the Nantahala Mountains, contains Siler Bald as the high point at 5,216 feet. The bald is surrounded by forested mountains, ridges, valleys, and streams. Other prominent high points in the area include Thorn Mountain at 4,744 feet and Panther Knob at 4,621 feet. Rufus Morgan Falls, a scenic waterfall with a trail leading to it, is in the northeastern corner of the area. The low point occurs at about 3,100 feet where Roaring Fork Creek leaves the area as it flows to the Nantahala River.

A range of ecozones are represented in the area including mesic oak, acidic cove, rich cove, high elevation red oak, and northern hardwood. Portions of the area have high elevation seep habitats which support populations of the rare purple sedge. Seasonally, a variety of plants including wildflowers, blackberries, and blueberries draw visitors to this area.

Current Uses

The area contains a range of recreation opportunities, wildlife, and timber management activities. Fishing and hunting are popular within the area, and the area has over 17.5 miles of closed Maintenance Level 1 and Maintenance Level 2 roads which serve as trails and linear wildlife openings. Much of the area contains high quality wildlife habitat, particularly for black bear, and is a popular hunting area.

There are 12 maintained wildlife plots within the area. The collection of ginseng also takes place within the area.

Part of the area is currently managed for maintaining the open conditions at Siler Bald.

Evaluation of Wilderness Characteristics

Apparent Naturalness

Much of the area has been logged in the recent past and there are many Maintenance Level 1 and Maintenance Level 2 roads that lead to maintained wildlife openings and vegetation treatments: 117 acres have undergone timber management in the past 20 years, and about 642 acres more in prior decades (21-40 years). The area contains 49 acres of maintained wildlife fields and over 17 miles of roads routinely mowed as linear wildlife openings (8.3 miles of maintenance level 1 and 7.2 miles of maintenance level 2 roads) and six road stream crossings. Siler Bald is also mowed to maintain the open grassy bald. Recent management activities represent a departure from natural conditions; however, many older treatments are returning to an appearance of natural conditions.

Wayah Crest trailhead is a former campground that is now a small picnic area with parking and an Appalachian Trail trailhead for Siler Bald on the north side where the Appalachian Trail crosses SR 1310 in addition to hunter, hiker, and biker access. Siler Bald Shelter is a backcountry shelter that is located about a half mile off the Appalachian Trail on a blazed spur trail; this lean-to sleeps six with room for tent camping.

Other - Opportunities for Solitude or Primitive & Unconfined Recreation

Opportunities for solitude are generally compromised in this area because much of the area is topographically exposed to surrounding developments, and because it is popular for hiking, scenery, fishing, and hunting, there is high potential for encountering other visitors. Sights and sounds of civilization are evident from vehicular traffic along US 64 and SR1310. Dirty John Gun Range is located on the north side of SR1310 and sounds from this shooting range can be heard in the northern portions of the area.

There are opportunities for primitive and unconfined recreation in the area, with main access points from closed Forest Service roads. Hikers frequent the area, with off trail hiking, and there are many hunting and fishing opportunities available in the area, with 49 acres of maintained wildlife fields and openings within the area providing wildlife habitat.

The area contains two hike-only trails for a total of 13.5 miles; the one mile Rufus Morgan Trail (NFST 27, trailhead at NFSR 388) which leads to Rufus Morgan Falls, and a 12.5 mile section of the Appalachian Trail with a trailhead just off of US 64 on the south side and off of SR1310 on the north side.

Other Values - Unique or Outstanding Qualities

Siler Bald is a manmade open grassy bald, with scenic views of the surrounding mountains. It is easily accessed from the Appalachian Trail trailheads. The views from the top include Wine Spring Bald (and the radio/TV towers there) and Wayah Bald Tower to the north; Albert Mountain to the southeast; Standing Indian Mountain to the south; and Snowbird and Chilhowee Mountains to the west. Nantahala Lake is partially visible to the northwest. The Trail of Tears crosses through the area.

The mountainous terrain, clear flowing streams, waterfalls, scenic vantage points from the high elevation bald, gathering opportunities, and wildlife viewing attract many visitors. The area also contains one research plot and 192 acres of an eligible Wild and Scenic River Corridor. There are two State Natural Heritage Areas within the Siler Bald area.

Size & Manageability

The Siler Bald area, at 6,280 acres, has borders that are mostly adjacent to National Forest System lands. The core of the area, along the Appalachian Trail has a higher degree of wilderness characteristics compared to the areas adjacent to recent management and open roads.

Summary

Naturalness in the Siler Bald area is impacted by an abundance of Forest Service system roads as well as past and ongoing maintenance of wildlife fields. The core of the area, while more remote, is topographically exposed to surrounding developments including US64, Wayah Road, and Dirty John Shooting Range, all of which impact opportunities for solitude.

Quantitative Summary of Items/Activities within the Siler Bald Area

Disclaimer: Information was generated from FS spatial datasets. All figures are approximate.

Description of Area	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Spruce-Fir Ecozone:	acres	19.8
Northern Hardwood Ecozone:	acres	645.2
High Elevation Red Oak Ecozone:	acres	682.2
Acidic Cove Ecozone:	acres	1,136.1
Rich Cove Ecozone:	acres	849.5
Mesic Oak Ecozone:	acres	2,450.2
Dry-Mesic Oak Ecozone:	acres	8.2
Dry Oak Ecozone:	acres	214.0
Pine-Oak/Heath Ecozone:	acres	273.5
Shortleaf Pine Ecozone:	acres	0
Alluvial Forest Ecozone:	acres	0

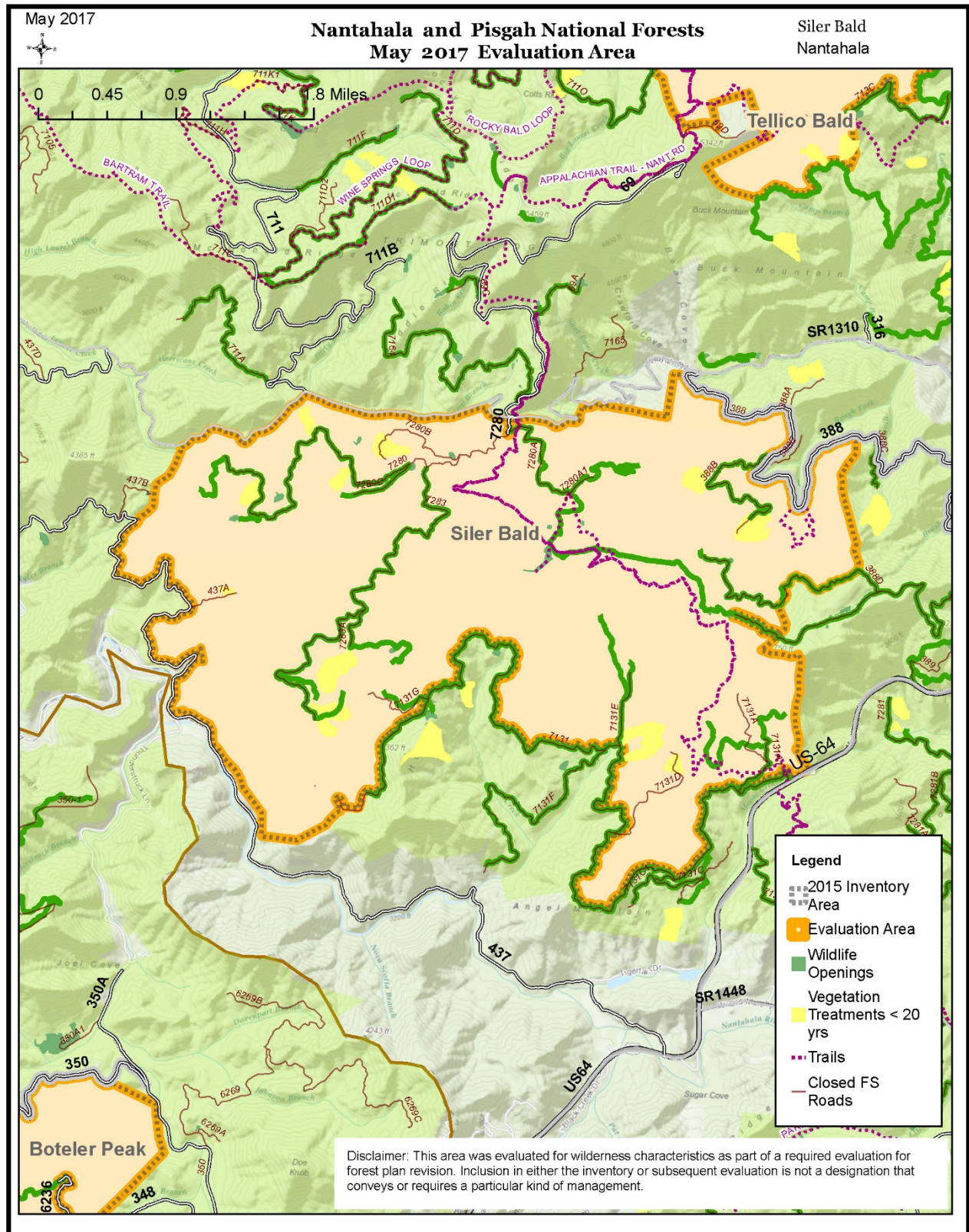
Apparent Naturalness	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Maintenance Level 1 National Forest System Roads:	miles	8.3
Closed Maintenance Level 2 National Forest System Roads:	miles	7.2
Road Stream Crossings, Bridge:	number	0
Road Stream Crossings, Other:	number	6
Trail Stream Crossings, Bridge:	number	0
Vegetation Management, 0-20 years old:	acres	117.3
Vegetation Management, 21-40 years old:	acres	641.5
Maintained Wildlife Fields (may overlap Bald Management Area):	acres	48.4
Existing Wilderness Study Area (WSA):	acres	0
Existing Inventoried Roadless Area (IRA may overlap WSA):	acres	0

Solitude or Primitive & Unconfined Recreation	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Current Backcountry Management Area (may overlap WSA & IRA):	acres	0
Inventoried Primitive Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) Setting:	acres	0
Inventoried Semi-Primitive Non-Motorized ROS Setting:	acres	66.8

	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Solitude or Primitive & Unconfined Recreation		
Inventoried Semi-Primitive Motorized ROS Setting (buffer of adjacent roads):	acres	3,390.7
Inventoried Roded Natural ROS Setting (buffer of adjacent roads):	acres	2,822.6
National Forest System Trail, Hike-only Allowed Use:	miles	13.5
National Forest System Trail, Hike-Bike Allowed Use:	miles	0
National Forest System Trail, Hike-Horse Allowed Use:	miles	0
National Forest System Trail, Hike-Bike-Horse Allowed Use:	miles	0

	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Unique & Outstanding Features		
Current Special Interest Management Area (scenic, geologic, botanical, zoological):	acres	0
Current Designated Wild & Scenic River Corridor (1/4 mile each side):	acres	0
Current Eligible Wild & Scenic River Corridor (1/4 mile each side):	acres	191.6
Research Natural Area:	acres	0

	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Size & Manageability		
Area, Total:	acres	6280.0
Private/Non-Federal Inholdings, Total:	acres	0
Private/Non-Federal Inholdings, Count:	number	0
Outstanding or Reserved Subsurface Mineral Rights:	acres	0
Current Bald Management Area:	acres	0
Forest Research Plots, Count:	number	0



Name: Southern Nantahala Extension Area

Acres: 4,298 acres

Description of Area

Location & Access

The Southern Nantahala Extension area is adjacent to the congressionally designated Southern Nantahala Wilderness on the Nantahala Ranger District of the Nantahala NF. The area is located in Macon County, NC, and is bordered on the north by NFSR67. The area is less than 100 feet across at its narrowest point and there is a protrusion in the northeast that is approximately 650 feet across where the area abuts Ball Creek Road (NFSR 83).

Numerous trails through this area provide access to the Southern Nantahala Wilderness to the south including Kimsey Creek, Big Indian Loop, Little Indian, the Appalachian Trail, Lower Trail Ridge, and Timber Ridge Trail. There are several miles of closed roads off of NFSR71 on the western boundary. The Standing Indian Campground also provides access to the area off of NFSR424.

Surroundings

This area is adjacent to the Southern Nantahala Wilderness along the southern boundary and bordered by national forest system lands to the north. The northern border is irregular and follows NFSR67. Standing Indian campground is located on the northern border off of NFSR424. The western boundary is defined by Deep Gap Road (NFSR72), which separates this area from the Chunky Gal Extension inventory area.

Topography & Vegetation

Standing Indian Mountain, part of a south-facing horseshoe-shaped massif that forms the Tallulah River basin, dominates the area. To the north, ridges radiate from the closed end toward the upper Nantahala River. There are several peaks over 4,000 feet in the area. Scream Ridge is the dominant ridge in the southeastern part of the area.

The area primarily includes acidic cove, rich cove, and mesic oak ecozones with some areas of old growth forest. The area contains Southern Appalachian bogs and swamp-bog complexes.

Current Uses

Current uses in this area include horseback riding, fishing, hunting, hiking, and traditional gathering of forest products. Approximately half of the area is currently managed for backcountry recreation with approximately seven miles of closed maintenance level 1 and 2 road; these roads are maintained as linear wildlife fields and frequently used by hunters, hikers, and equestrians. There are mowed wildlife fields on Scream Ridge. There are many miles of hiking trails in the area including Kimsey Creek, Big Indian Loop, Little Indian, Lower Trail Ridge, and Timber Ridge Trail. The Appalachian Trail runs along the far eastern boundary of the area coming north from Georgia. Trails near Standing Indian campground are also used extensively by recreationists in the area.

Evaluation of Wilderness Characteristics

Apparent Naturalness

The Southern Nantahala Extension area has been logged in the recent past in the Park Creek area and there are remnants of old logging roads and dispersed campsites throughout the area. Several hiking and horse trails run through the area. There are approximately 20 acres of wildlife fields that are maintained by regular mowing and represent a departure from naturalness.

Opportunities for Solitude or Primitive & Unconfined Recreation

Contiguous to the Southern Nantahala Wilderness, this area provides opportunities for solitude and primitive recreation. The area currently managed as an Inventoried Roadless Area (1,783 acres) provides the best opportunity for solitude away from sights and sounds of open roads. Trails in the area adjacent to the Standing Indian Campground are extensively used, thereby detracting from the opportunity for solitude in their immediate area during high use seasons.

Other Values - Unique or Outstanding Qualities

This area contains southern Appalachian bogs and swamp-bog complexes as well as forests with old growth character. Approximately 800 acres of the Nantahala River, an eligible Wild and Scenic River, are within the northern section of the area.

Size & Manageability

If recommended, this area would be an extension of the Southern Nantahala Wilderness with the eastern boundary defined by NFSR 67 and NFSR 83. The area east of Scream Ridge and outside of the Inventoried Roadless Area has a lower degree of wilderness characteristics compared to the area currently managed as an IRA.

Summary

Recent vegetation management and existing wildlife fields have minor impacts to naturalness in parts of the Southern Nantahala Extension Area. Opportunities for solitude or primitive and unconfined recreation are impacted in the northern portion of the area by the adjacent developed campground, dispersed campsites, and the high recreation use. The best opportunity for managing for wilderness characteristics are in the southeastern sections that are less accessible and are within the designated Inventoried Roadless Areas.

Quantitative Summary of Items/Activities within the Southern Nantahala Extension Area

Disclaimer: Information was generated from FS spatial datasets. All figures are approximate.

Description of Area	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Spruce-Fir Ecozone:	acres	88.8
Northern Hardwood Ecozone:	acres	296.6
High Elevation Red Oak Ecozone:	acres	65.5
Acidic Cove Ecozone:	acres	2,007.3
Rich Cove Ecozone:	acres	649.0
Mesic Oak Ecozone:	acres	549.0
Dry-Mesic Oak Ecozone:	acres	93.1
Dry Oak Ecozone:	acres	395.3
Pine-Oak/Heath Ecozone:	acres	135.4
Shortleaf Pine Ecozone:	acres	0
Alluvial Forest Ecozone:	acres	37.0

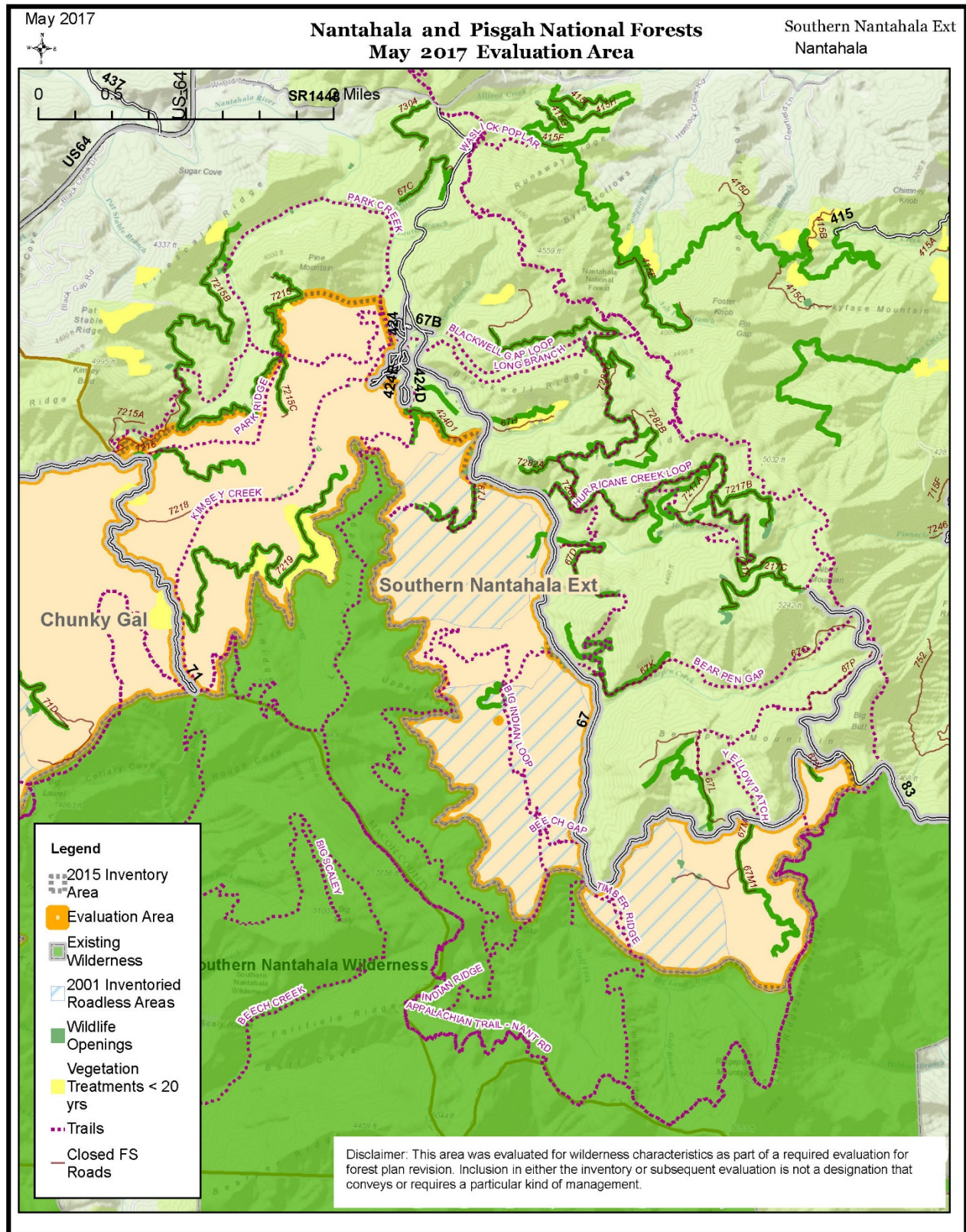
Apparent Naturalness	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Maintenance Level 1 National Forest System Roads:	miles	3.5
Closed Maintenance Level 2 National Forest System Roads:	miles	3.6
Road Stream Crossings, Bridge:	number	0
Road Stream Crossings, Other:	number	7
Trail Stream Crossings, Bridge:	number	0
Vegetation Management, 0-20 years old:	acres	87.2
Vegetation Management, 21-40 years old:	acres	315.3
Maintained Wildlife Fields (may overlap Bald Management Area):	acres	20.9
Existing Wilderness Study Area (WSA):	acres	0
Existing Inventoried Roadless Area (IRA may overlap WSA):	acres	1,783.0

Solitude or Primitive & Unconfined Recreation	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Current Backcountry Management Area (may overlap WSA & IRA):	acres	2,249.1
Inventoried Primitive Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) Setting:	acres	0

	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Solitude or Primitive & Unconfined Recreation		
Inventoried Semi-Primitive Non-Motorized ROS Setting:	acres	570.7
Inventoried Semi-Primitive Motorized ROS Setting (buffer of adjacent roads):	acres	1,074.5
Inventoried Roaded Natural ROS Setting (buffer of adjacent roads):	acres	2,653.2
National Forest System Trail, Hike-only Allowed Use:	miles	11.2
National Forest System Trail, Hike-Bike Allowed Use:	miles	0
National Forest System Trail, Hike-Horse Allowed Use:	miles	4.2
National Forest System Trail, Hike-Bike-Horse Allowed Use:	miles	0

	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Unique & Outstanding Features		
Current Special Interest Management Area (scenic, geologic, botanical, zoological):	acres	16.6
Current Designated Wild & Scenic River Corridor (1/4 mile each side):	acres	0
Current Eligible Wild & Scenic River Corridor (1/4 mile each side):	acres	799.9
Research Natural Area:	acres	0

	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Size & Manageability		
Area, Total:	acres	4,298.4
Private/Non-Federal Inholdings, Total:	acres	0.0
Private/Non-Federal Inholdings, Count:	number	2
Outstanding or Reserved Subsurface Mineral Rights:	acres	0
Current Bald Management Area:	acres	0
Forest Research Plots, Count:	number	0



Name: Tellico Bald

Acres: 12,525 acres

Description of Area

Location & Access

The Tellico Bald area is on the Nantahala Ranger District of the Nantahala NF in Macon County, NC. It is located south of the Wesser Bald area, east of State Route 1310 (SR 1310), north of Wayah Bald, west of SR28, and about 10 miles northwest of Franklin, NC. Access to the south and west side of the area is from the Appalachian Trail with three trailheads; one located near Wayah Bald on the south side, a second located off State Road 1397 to Burningtown Gap, and the third located near Tellico Gap on the north side. Other access points to the east and north sides are available via closed low-maintenance level roads; Wildes Cove Road (NFSR 7051), Younce Creek Road (NFSR 7052), and Turkey Knob Road (NFSR 714-D).

Surroundings

The Tellico Bald boundaries are very irregular with many protrusions. The upper half of the eastern boundary is adjacent to non-federal lands and follows along the NFS border. The northern boundary is defined by SR1365. With minor exceptions, part of the eastern boundary, the southern boundary and most of the western boundary are adjacent to NFS lands, and many are bordered by NFS roads.

Tellico Creek flows into the Little Tennessee River near the northeastern boundary. The community of Burningtown is near the eastern boundary and the southern boundary is adjacent to Wayah Bald. The southwestern boundary is adjacent to NFS lands in the vicinity of Rocky Bald. Much of the western Boundary is adjacent to NFS lands in the vicinity of Otter Mountain and Cold Spring Creek.

Topography & Vegetation

The area is part of the Nantahala Mountains and the defining feature of the area is the dominant ridgeline that runs generally south to north from Wayah Bald to Tellico Gap. The Appalachian Trail follows along this ridge and after leaving Wayah Bald dips down into the vicinity of Licklog Gap and Split Whiteoak Gap before climbing to some of the significant high points; Burningtown Bald, Copper Ridge Bald (high point at 5,256 feet), Tellico Bald, Black Bald, and Rocky Bald.

The steep west facing slopes contain additional minor ridges and valleys, and streams flow to the Whiteoak River. The eastern side has steep slopes coming off the ridge; however, the area extends a greater distance to the east to contain a number of ridges and knobs where the slopes then become gentler as the area reaches the small communities in this vicinity (Stiles and Burningtown). Streams flowing to the east lead to Burningtown Creek and the Little Tennessee River. The low point of the area is about 2,000 feet, on the northeast side where Burningtown Creek flows near Shope Cove. The area is characterized by high elevation mature forest (over 1,800 acres of forest with old growth characteristics), high elevation rocky summits, and open heath balds. Dominant ecozones include rich cove, high elevation red oak, acidic cove, mesic oak, and northern hardwood mesic oak.

Current Uses

The area is managed for backcountry recreation, scenery, timber, and wildlife habitat. There are approximately 19 miles of hiking trail in the area, including the Appalachian National Scenic Trail and the Bartram National Recreation Trail, which are both designated as hike-only trails. Over 3,450 acres of the area are managed for backcountry recreation. There are 11.3 miles of closed NFS roads (and 23 miles of

roads bordering the area), many of which are used for horseback riding and are open to mountain biking. The area is a popular for hunting with some excellent ruffed grouse habitat. Other uses include fishing, backpacking, scenery and nature viewing, and gathering forest products (ginseng, ramps, etc.).

Evaluation of Wilderness Characteristics

Apparent Naturalness

Much of the area has had historic logging; however, there are thousands of acres of natural appearing older forest and heath balds, especially on the steeper slopes, higher elevations and in the core area east of Copper Ridge Bald. Evidence of past timber management and wildlife habitat improvement is most obvious near the area's perimeter. Vegetation management has occurred on 167 acres in the past 20 years and associated skid roads are also evident in certain locations.

The area has 29.5 acres of wildlife fields that are maintained by mowing. There are over 11 miles of low-maintenance level NFS roads, many of which are mowed as wildlife fields, access wildlife openings and/or are used as trails. There are seven road stream crossings in the area, some of which have culverts. There is a shelter and a privy along the Appalachian Trail at Cold Springs.

Opportunities for Solitude or Primitive & Unconfined Recreation

About 28% of the area is currently managed for backcountry recreation, which offers opportunities for solitude. The Appalachian Trail runs north to south along the ridge and intersects the east-west Bartram Trail just outside the area at Wayah Bald. In the spring (and to a lesser extent in the fall), thousands of through-hikers can be encountered along the Appalachian Trail, which can detract from solitude along the trail corridor. Trail use is much lighter outside of these high-use seasons, allowing improved opportunities for solitude.

The area is adjacent to SR1365 to the north, and SR1397 and NFS Road 711 to the west; the latter of which receives regular use. Although SR1365 receives moderate use and SR1397 receives relatively little use, vehicular noise is evident at times in their immediate vicinities.

Developed residential and agricultural lands are adjacent to the boundary, particularly along the northeastern (near Burnett Fields, Tellico) western (Kyle), and northwestern borders (Otter Mountain, Owenby Cove). Sights and sounds from adjacent uses may impact solitude along the periphery of the area but these impacts are not pervasive throughout the area as a whole. Low-maintenance level NFS roads within the area are often used by hunters, hikers, horseback riders, and mountain-bikers. Dirty John Shooting Range is located off NFS Road 711, and sounds of gunfire may be heard in southwestern portions of the area. The Franklin airport is six miles to the east with flight patterns often crossing the area. Wayah Bald historic fire tower is visible near the southern boundary, and the Wesser Bald fire tower/observation platform can be seen near the northern boundary as northbound AT hikers descend to Tellico Gap.

Opportunities for primitive and unconfined recreation exist across most of the area, but are mixed with uses not considered to be primitive. Primitive recreation activities within the area include hunting, fishing, hiking, backpacking, horseback riding, backcountry recreation, and scenery viewing. The Appalachian Trail and Bartram Trail intersect at Wayah Bald, providing for long-distance hiking opportunities in the area. Allowed recreation activities inconsistent with wilderness characteristics include mountain bike use on closed NFS roads within the area.

Other Values - Unique or Outstanding Qualities

The area's high ridges, knobs, heath balds, rock outcrops, and dense high-elevation old growth forests are outstanding within the surrounding landscape. A side trail from the Appalachian Trail leads northeast to a rock outcrop on Rocky Bald providing long range views to the Great Smoky Mountains National Park and north of this trail is the remnant of a rock retaining wall constructed by the Civilian Conservation Corps. The Trail of Tears is present in the area. Habitats for rare plants exist within the area. There are two State Natural Heritage Areas within the Tellico Bald area.

Size & Manageability

The Tellico Bald area is 12,525 acres but has a highly irregular shape with numerous protrusions on all sides. Where area boundaries are not coincident with roads they are not easily discernible on the ground. There are no non-federal inholdings but there are 2,083 acres of outstanding or reserved subsurface mineral rights in the area.

Summary

An irregular boundary shape and numerous narrow protrusions affect manageability of the Tellico Bald area for its wilderness characteristics. Given the configuration, sights and sounds of area roads and adjacent residential or agricultural lands affect solitude in some locations. Tellico Bald area has opportunities for solitude and primitive recreation in the core area currently managed as backcountry; however, this core area is relatively small at less than 2,500 acres. Additionally, many locations within the area have existing uses and infrastructure which detract from naturalness.

Quantitative Summary of Items/Activities within the Tellico Bald Area

Disclaimer: Information was generated from FS spatial datasets. All figures are approximate.

Description of Area	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Spruce-Fir Ecozone:	acres	32.4
Northern Hardwood Ecozone:	acres	1,562.4
High Elevation Red Oak Ecozone:	acres	1,751.2
Acidic Cove Ecozone:	acres	1,589.8
Rich Cove Ecozone:	acres	3,505.4
Mesic Oak Ecozone:	acres	1,579.3
Dry-Mesic Oak Ecozone:	acres	15.4
Dry Oak Ecozone:	acres	1,323.2
Pine-Oak/Heath Ecozone:	acres	1,153.4
Shortleaf Pine Ecozone:	acres	1.4
Alluvial Forest Ecozone:	acres	0

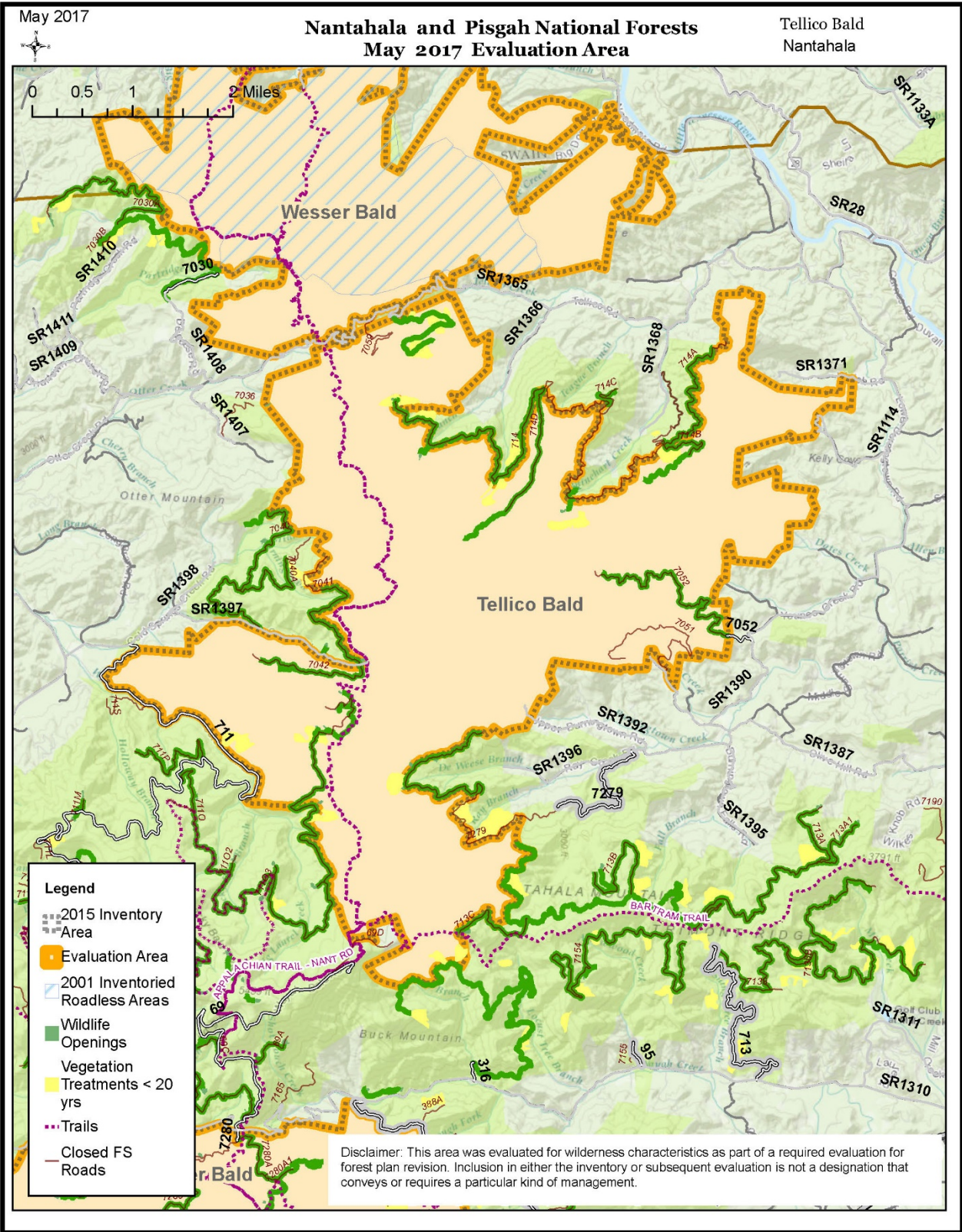
Apparent Naturalness	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Maintenance Level 1 National Forest System Roads:	miles	4.3
Closed Maintenance Level 2 National Forest System Roads:	miles	7.0
Road Stream Crossings, Bridge:	number	0
Road Stream Crossings, Other:	number	7
Trail Stream Crossings, Bridge:	number	0
Vegetation Management, 0-20 years old:	acres	166.6
Vegetation Management, 21-40 years old:	acres	1,082.8
Maintained Wildlife Fields (may overlap Bald Management Area):	acres	29.5
Existing Wilderness Study Area (WSA):	acres	0
Existing Inventoried Roadless Area (IRA may overlap WSA):	acres	0

Solitude or Primitive & Unconfined Recreation	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Current Backcountry Management Area (may overlap WSA & IRA):	acres	3,450.9
Inventoried Primitive Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) Setting:	acres	0
Inventoried Semi-Primitive Non-Motorized ROS Setting:	acres	2,444.4

	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Solitude or Primitive & Unconfined Recreation		
Inventoried Semi-Primitive Motorized ROS Setting (buffer of adjacent roads):	acres	4,863.7
Inventoried Roded Natural ROS Setting (buffer of adjacent roads):	acres	5,211.0
National Forest System Trail, Hike-only Allowed Use:	miles	18.9
National Forest System Trail, Hike-Bike Allowed Use:	miles	0
National Forest System Trail, Hike-Horse Allowed Use:	miles	0
National Forest System Trail, Hike-Bike-Horse Allowed Use:	miles	0

	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Unique & Outstanding Features		
Current Special Interest Management Area (scenic, geologic, botanical, zoological):	acres	0
Current Designated Wild & Scenic River Corridor (1/4 mile each side):	acres	0
Current Eligible Wild & Scenic River Corridor (1/4 mile each side):	acres	0
Research Natural Area:	acres	0

	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Size & Manageability		
Area, Total:	acres	12,524.5
Private/Non-Federal Inholdings, Total:	acres	0
Private/Non-Federal Inholdings, Count:	number	0
Outstanding or Reserved Subsurface Mineral Rights:	acres	2,083.2
Current Bald Management Area:	acres	0
Forest Research Plots, Count:	number	0



Name: Terrapin Mountain

Acres: 5,441 acres

Description of Area

Location & Access

The Terrapin Mountain area is located within the Nantahala Ranger District on the Nantahala NF in Jackson and Macon Counties, south of Cashiers, NC. The area can be accessed from Bull Pen Road along the southern boundary, State Route 1603 on the western boundary, and NFSR 4598, State Routes 1100, and 1104 on the east. There are multiple private road easements that extend into the area from the southern boundary and are used to access private inholdings.

Surroundings

The Terrapin Mountain area is irregularly shaped due to the surrounding private ownership, but is adjacent to NSF lands intermittently on the east, west and south sides. Uses on adjacent private lands include a water plant, private residences, and undeveloped forested lands. Located within the area on National Forest System lands to the east, is a solid waste collection site permitted to Jackson County.

To the south is Ellicott Rock Wilderness but the two areas are separated by Bull Pen Road, which receives heavy use year-round by local traffic and forest visitors. There are several small private inholdings with residences surrounded by NSF land that have been excluded from the area, these are south of Terrapin Mountain itself, but centrally located in relation to the whole area.

Topography & Vegetation

With an elevation of 4,400 feet, Terrapin Mountain is the highest peak in the area. Near the center of the area, precipitous rock faces, ranging from 500 to 800 feet, form a prominent rock-sided haystack; called a pluton or granitic dome. Fowler Creek originates near the southeastern portion of the area and forms a u-shaped amphitheater of rock cliffs. To the west is Chattooga River, which is strewn with granite boulders and rock outcrops, and is bound on its east side by Chattooga Cliffs.

The area's rugged landscape and steep slopes include rare habitats such as high elevation granitic domes, montane acidic cliffs, high elevation seeps, and low elevation granitic domes. Other natural communities in the area include heath balds, montane oak-hickory, pine oak heaths, rich cove forests, and acidic cove forests.

Current Uses

The designated Chattooga Wild and Scenic River corridor runs north to south along the western side of the Terrapin Mountain area and is managed to protect the outstandingly remarkable values of the Chattooga River. This river is popular with anglers and whitewater boaters, as well as hikers along the Chattooga River Trail. Rock climbing is also popular in the area. Approximately 1,508 acres of the area is currently managed for backcountry recreation, about 1,410 acres are in the Wild and Scenic River corridor, and the remainder of the area (approximately 2,523 acres) is managed for timber and wildlife.

Evaluation of Wilderness Characteristics

Apparent Naturalness

The Terrapin Mountain area includes some recent timber harvests but much of the interior of the area is natural appearing second growth forest; the result of logging that occurred in the early 1900s. Old

logging roads approach the summit of Terrapin Mountain but have become overgrown and do not detract from naturalness. There are recent timber cuts on the eastern side of the area off of State Route 1104 and on the far western side of the area off of SR 1603 and NFSR 1178. There are maintained linear wildlife fields at the end of NFSR 4598 and on NFSR 2052, NFSR 4564 and NFSR 1178A. There is an old logging road that approaches the base of Bear Pen Mountain. Recent timber cuts and maintained wildlife fields represent a departure from naturalness in their immediate vicinity.

Opportunities for Solitude or Primitive & Unconfined Recreation

The Terrapin Mountain area provides opportunities for solitude, particularly in the area around Terrapin Mountain which is difficult to access because of the steep rock faces. At lower elevations, sights and sounds of civilization do not impact solitude. The topography of the area's boundaries, which include high mountaintops, hide views of surrounding civilization. At higher elevations, sights and sounds from development on adjacent land uses can impact opportunities for solitude, due to their exposure to the surrounding landscape. The western portion of the area (within the Chattooga Wild and Scenic River corridor) is highly visited and travelled during hunting and fishing seasons as well as fall leaf-off season; and encounters with other users may be common at time.

Primitive and unconfined recreation are also available in the area, with a portion being managed for backcountry recreation and another as a W&SR corridor. The Chattooga River Trail and other hiking trails are between Bull Pen Road and Scotsman Creek on the western side of the area. In the winter months kayaking is allowed on the Chattooga River at certain flow levels, and there can be groups of boaters seen on the river and nearby trails. Backcountry angling and rock climbing are also a popular primitive recreation activities.

Other Values - Unique or Outstanding Qualities

The Chattooga Cliffs provide a unique scenic attraction along the Chattooga Wild and Scenic River. There are rare plant communities present as well as high quality waters that support diverse aquatic communities. The granitic dome of Terrapin Mountain is also very scenic and has unique geology.

Size & Manageability

The Terrapin Mountain area is highly irregularly shaped, with boundaries that follow a combination of open roads and Forest Service ownership. Much of the northern boundary is adjacent to non-federal ownership with several private residences just north of the area. There are ten private inholdings within the outer boundary of Forest Service ownership for this area, nine of which have been excluded from the area of consideration but would still impact manageability of the area for wilderness characteristics.

Summary

The core of the Terrapin Mountain area is generally free from recent vegetation management and has opportunities for primitive and unconfined recreation, particularly within the Chattooga River Wild and Scenic River Corridor and in the area around Terrapin Mountain. The areas around the periphery have a lower degree of wilderness characteristics as adjacent land uses, and fragmented ownership impact naturalness and opportunities for solitude. Recent and ongoing management on the western and eastern sides detract from naturalness in those areas.

Quantitative Summary of Items/Activities within the Terrapin Mountain Area

Disclaimer: Information was generated from FS spatial datasets. All figures are approximate.

Description of Area	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Spruce-Fir Ecozone:	acres	0
Northern Hardwood Ecozone:	acres	0
High Elevation Red Oak Ecozone:	acres	4.5
Acidic Cove Ecozone:	acres	1,363.8
Rich Cove Ecozone:	acres	47.4
Mesic Oak Ecozone:	acres	1,300.6
Dry-Mesic Oak Ecozone:	acres	1,730.4
Dry Oak Ecozone:	acres	907.8
Pine-Oak/Heath Ecozone:	acres	72.1
Shortleaf Pine Ecozone:	acres	0
Alluvial Forest Ecozone:	acres	0

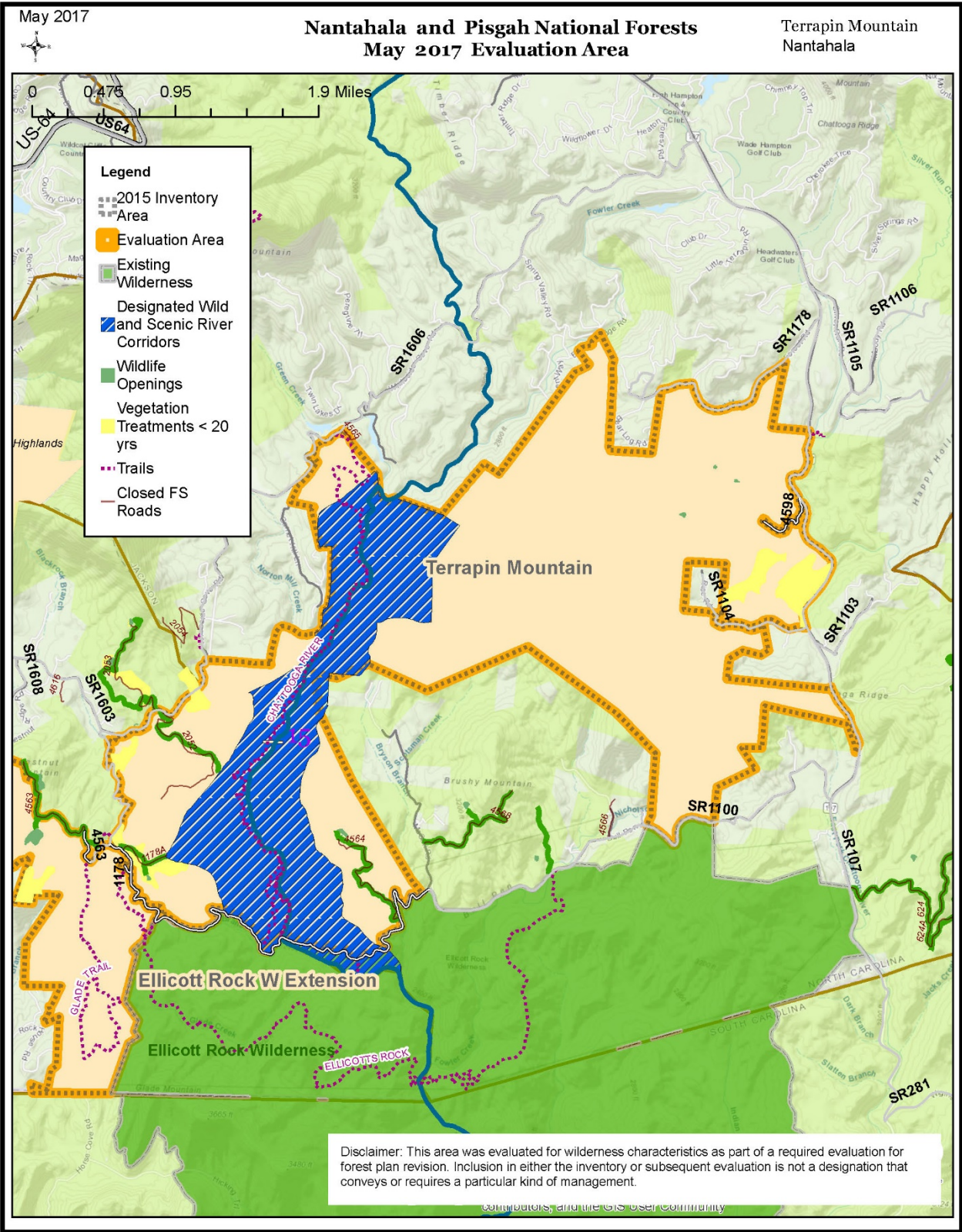
Apparent Naturalness	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Maintenance Level 1 National Forest System Roads:	miles	0.4
Closed Maintenance Level 2 National Forest System Roads:	miles	3.5
Road Stream Crossings, Bridge:	number	0
Road Stream Crossings, Other:	number	3
Trail Stream Crossings, Bridge:	number	7
Vegetation Management, 0-20 years old:	acres	176.4
Vegetation Management, 21-40 years old:	acres	206.2
Maintained Wildlife Fields (may overlap Bald Management Area):	acres	8.1
Existing Wilderness Study Area (WSA):	acres	0
Existing Inventoried Roadless Area (IRA may overlap WSA):	acres	0

Solitude or Primitive & Unconfined Recreation	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Current Backcountry Management Area (may overlap WSA & IRA):	acres	1,508.2
Inventoried Primitive Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) Setting:	acres	0
Inventoried Semi-Primitive Non-Motorized ROS Setting:	acres	1,566.5

	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Solitude or Primitive & Unconfined Recreation		
Inventoried Semi-Primitive Motorized ROS Setting (buffer of adjacent roads):	acres	429.6
Inventoried Roded Natural ROS Setting (buffer of adjacent roads):	acres	3,432.1
National Forest System Trail, Hike-only Allowed Use:	miles	6.7
National Forest System Trail, Hike-Bike Allowed Use:	miles	0
National Forest System Trail, Hike-Horse Allowed Use:	miles	0
National Forest System Trail, Hike-Bike-Horse Allowed Use:	miles	0

	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Unique & Outstanding Features		
Current Special Interest Management Area (scenic, geologic, botanical, zoological):	acres	0
Current Designated Wild & Scenic River Corridor (1/4 mile each side):	acres	1,409.8
Current Eligible Wild & Scenic River Corridor (1/4 mile each side):	acres	0
Research Natural Area:	acres	0

	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Size & Manageability		
Area, Total:	acres	5,440.5
Private/Non-Federal Inholdings, Total:	acres	52.3
Private/Non-Federal Inholdings, Count:	number	1
Outstanding or Reserved Subsurface Mineral Rights:	acres	43.4
Current Bald Management Area:	acres	0
Forest Research Plots, Count:	number	0



Name: Wesser Bald

Acres: 6,642 acres

Description of Area

Location & Access

The Wesser Bald area is located in Swain and Macon Counties on the Nantahala Ranger District of the Nantahala NF. Wesser Bald is located between NC1365 to the south; NC1408/NFSR7030 and NC1410 to the west; US19E to the north; and NC1114 to the east. Two roads, NC1103 and NC1107, branch off of US19E and lead right to the area's northern boundary. NC1365 and a powerline corridor separate the Wesser Bald area from the Tellico Bald area to the south. Access to the area is from three trailheads: Appalachian Trail from US19E/NC1103 and Wesser Creek Trail from NC1107 to the north; and also from the Appalachian Trail from NC1365 to the south.

Surroundings

The area boundaries are highly irregular, with two large protrusions to the north, two to the east, one to the southwest, and one to the west. These protrusions primarily follow fragmented Forest Service ownership boundaries resulting in a high amount of edge abutting private lands. The northernmost extrusion is 245 feet wide at the narrowest point.

The Nantahala River, an eligible Wild and Scenic River, and a commercial/public take-out is just north of the area. The Little Tennessee River is located just east of the area. The Great Smoky Mountains Railroad, an American Heritage Rail, is located on the north side of the Nantahala River.

Topography & Vegetation

The Wesser Bald area has steep terrain with high-elevation ridgelines that descend into deep coves and valleys. The most prominent feature is Wesser Bald, which is the highest point found in the area. This bald is a continuation of the string of high peaks of the Nantahala Mountains that extend south towards Tellico Bald and Wayah Bald. Elevation ranges from 4,627 feet at Wesser Bald down to approximately 1,750 feet near the Nantahala River to the north.

A broad range of ecozones are represented in the area, including northern hardwood, high elevation red oak, acidic cove, rich cove, mesic oak, dry-mesic oak, dry oak, and pine-oak/heath.

Current Uses

Primary uses in the Wesser Bald area include hiking via the Appalachian Trail and Wesser Creek Trail, both of which are designated as hike-only. The Appalachian Trail has shelters along the trail within the area. A lookout tower on Wesser Bald is a popular destination, and visitors access the tower from the Appalachian Trail by way of the Tellico Gap Trailhead off NC1365.

Approximately 5,254 acres in the area are currently managed for backcountry recreation, and 4,021 acres, are within the Wesser Bald Inventoried Roadless Area (which overlaps the backcountry management). The Nantahala River, located just to the north of the area, is an eligible Wild and Scenic River, and 55 acres of the eligible WSR corridor is within the area. Some locations within the area have been logged within the last 21-40 years, including two units around Partridge Ridge and two others on the southern border.

Evaluation of Wilderness Characteristics

Apparent Naturalness

Much of the Wesser Bald area, especially portions that are located in the Inventoried Roadless Area and backcountry area, have no evidence of management activities within the last 40 years that affect naturalness of the area. There is a lookout tower on top of Wesser Bald that is accessible by way of the Appalachian Trail. This structure is an historic fire tower constructed of steel lattice and has been converted to have an open viewing deck for public access. A powerline corridor runs a straight line along the ridge between NC1365 and the lookout tower. There are maintained linear wildlife openings along the southwestern edge of the area, near vegetation treatments that occurred in the last 21 to 40 years. There are two Appalachian Trail shelters within the area. The lookout tower, wildlife openings, powerline corridor, and trail shelters are all human modifications and development which detract from naturalness in their immediate vicinity.

Opportunities for Solitude or Primitive & Unconfined Recreation

Opportunities for solitude exist across much of the area, and especially in the core Inventoried Roadless Area portion. Impacts to solitude within the area can be experienced along the Appalachian Trail during heavy use seasons of spring, summer, and fall; when encounters with other forest visitors is likely. This is especially true in the southern portion of the area near Wesser Bald lookout tower, which is a popular day-hike destination.

Sights and sounds of civilization are also evident in the northernmost portion of the area which extends as a large protrusion near US19E, the Great Smoky Mountains Railroad, and the heavily used Nantahala River. Other sights and sounds of civilization exist at the eastern edge of the area near the Little Tennessee River and NC1114; and the southern boundary near NC1365. However, these impacts to solitude are not pervasive across the entire area. There are two trails that offer primitive and unconfined recreation in the area, which are primarily within the Inventoried Roadless Area.

Other Values - Unique or Outstanding Qualities

Wesser Bald is part of the high-elevation ridgeline of the Nantahala Mountains, a scenic attraction for visitors. A segment of The Trail of Tears is present in the area, which has a National Historic Trail designation. There are over 2,000 acres of designated old growth in the area as well as the Wesser Bald State Natural Heritage Area.

Size & Manageability

The core of the area of 4,021 acres is within the Wesser Bald Inventoried Roadless Area, and an overlapping 5,424 acres are currently managed for backcountry recreation. Area boundaries are highly irregular, with several large protrusions and many smaller protrusions extending into adjacent to private lands. This fragmented ownership could make managing for wilderness characteristics difficult in areas outside of the core roadless area. There is one private inholding located within the area and approximately 45 acres of the area have outstanding or reserved subsurface mineral rights.

Summary

While the core area within the Wesser Bald Inventoried Roadless Area has a degree of wilderness characteristics, the boundary of the larger area is highly irregular and fragmented with private ownership, including a private inholding. The lookout tower and the cleared powerline corridor detract from naturalness in their immediate vicinity. Sights and sounds from adjacent lands have negative impacts to solitude along several boundaries of the area, but are not pervasive throughout the area.

Quantitative Summary of Items/Activities within the Wesser Bald Area

Disclaimer: Information was generated from FS spatial datasets. All figures are approximate.

Description of Area	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Spruce-Fir Ecozone:	acres	5.3
Northern Hardwood Ecozone:	acres	271.8
High Elevation Red Oak Ecozone:	acres	213.7
Acidic Cove Ecozone:	acres	1,104.9
Rich Cove Ecozone:	acres	1,994.8
Mesic Oak Ecozone:	acres	1,400.3
Dry-Mesic Oak Ecozone:	acres	215.5
Dry Oak Ecozone:	acres	383.0
Pine-Oak/Heath Ecozone:	acres	956.9
Shortleaf Pine Ecozone:	acres	74.0
Alluvial Forest Ecozone:	acres	0

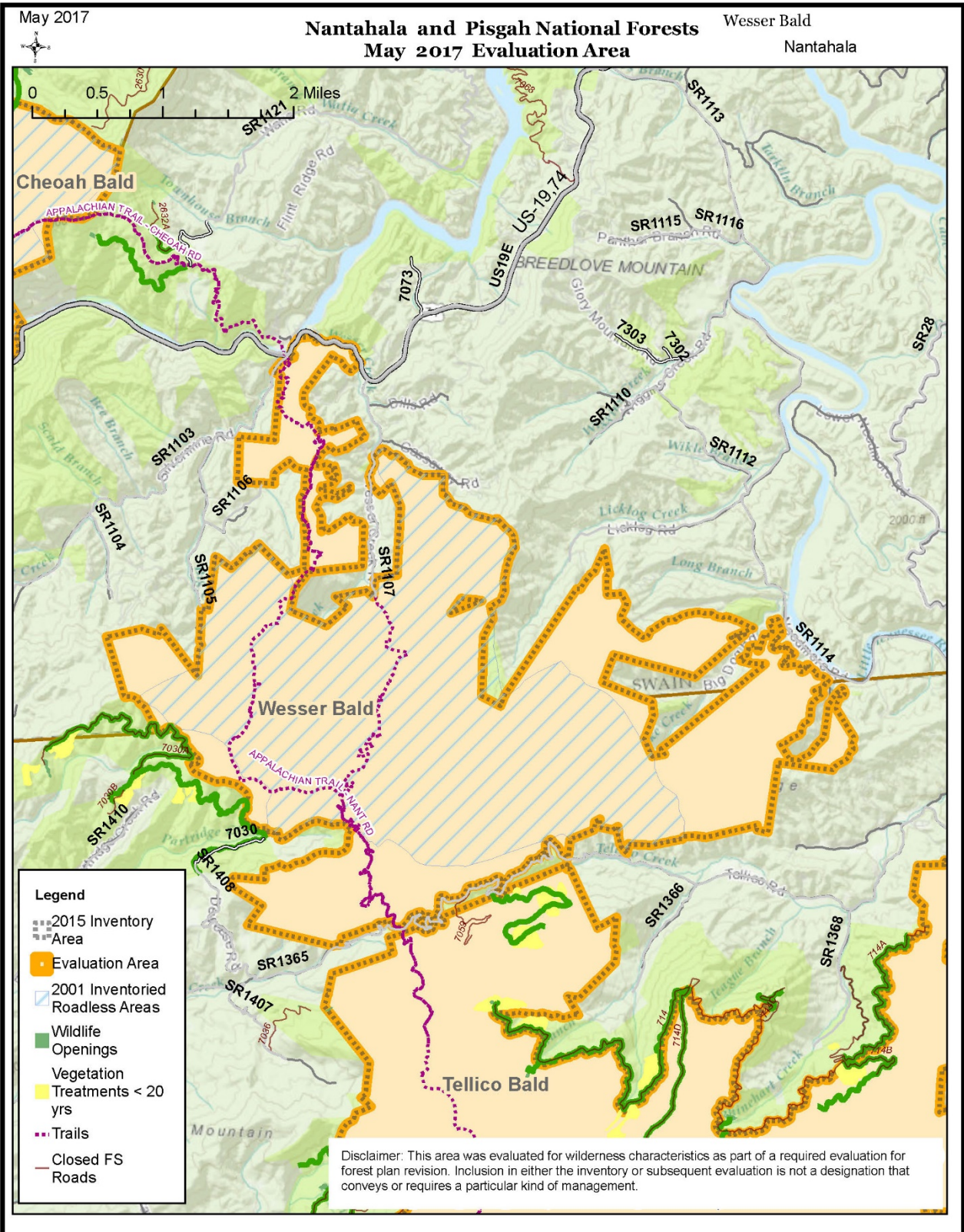
Apparent Naturalness	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Maintenance Level 1 National Forest System Roads:	miles	0
Closed Maintenance Level 2 National Forest System Roads:	miles	0
Road Stream Crossings, Bridge:	number	0
Road Stream Crossings, Other:	number	0
Trail Stream Crossings, Bridge:	number	0
Vegetation Management, 0-20 years old:	acres	0
Vegetation Management, 21-40 years old:	acres	25.5
Maintained Wildlife Fields (may overlap Bald Management Area):	acres	0.3
Existing Wilderness Study Area (WSA):	acres	0
Existing Inventoried Roadless Area (IRA may overlap WSA):	acres	4,021.2

Solitude or Primitive & Unconfined Recreation	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Current Backcountry Management Area (may overlap WSA & IRA):	acres	5,253.9
Inventoried Primitive Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) Setting:	acres	0
Inventoried Semi-Primitive Non-Motorized ROS Setting:	acres	3,093.8

	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Solitude or Primitive & Unconfined Recreation		
Inventoried Semi-Primitive Motorized ROS Setting (buffer of adjacent roads):	acres	113.8
Inventoried Roded Natural ROS Setting (buffer of adjacent roads):	acres	3,426.7
National Forest System Trail, Hike-only Allowed Use:	miles	17.8
National Forest System Trail, Hike-Bike Allowed Use:	miles	0
National Forest System Trail, Hike-Horse Allowed Use:	miles	0
National Forest System Trail, Hike-Bike-Horse Allowed Use:	miles	0

	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Unique & Outstanding Features		
Current Special Interest Management Area (scenic, geologic, botanical, zoological):	acres	0
Current Designated Wild & Scenic River Corridor (1/4 mile each side):	acres	0
Current Eligible Wild & Scenic River Corridor (1/4 mile each side):	acres	55.5
Research Natural Area:	acres	0

	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Size & Manageability		
Area, Total:	acres	6,642.1
Private/Non-Federal Inholdings, Total:	acres	6.2
Private/Non-Federal Inholdings, Count:	number	1
Outstanding or Reserved Subsurface Mineral Rights:	acres	44.6
Current Bald Management Area:	acres	0
Forest Research Plots, Count:	number	0



Pisgah Ranger District

Name: Cedar Rock Mountain

Acres: 8,682 acres

Description of Area

Location & Access

The Cedar Rock Mountain area is in Transylvania County, and lies between Cathey's Creek Road (NFSR471) and Davidson River Road (NFSR475); south of the Pisgah Center for Wildlife Education (fish hatchery) and northwest of Brevard. Non-motorized access is via NFS roads and trails. Area trailheads include, but are not limited to, the Pisgah Center for Wildlife Education, Gloucester Gap, Kuykendall Group Campground, and Bracken Mountain.

Surroundings

The area's northern and western boundaries are adjacent to national forest lands, while much of the southeastern boundaries are adjacent to private lands. Adjacent private lands contain rural mountain land, housing developments, and the town of Brevard at less than two miles away.

Topography & Vegetation

The prominent feature of this area is Cedar Rock Mountain, at over 4,000 feet in elevation. This granitic dome, along with nearby John Rock, was formed millions of years ago. These rounded granite mountains provide habitat for rare plant species and scenic overlooks. The area also has several other peaks over 3,500 feet, and steep terrain with a range in elevation of over 1,800 feet. The area contains several ecozones typical of mid-elevation Southern Appalachian forests, including acidic cove, rich cove, dry-mesic oak, dry-oak, and some pine-oak-heath.

Current Uses

The Cedar Rock Mountain area contains a range of dispersed recreation opportunities and forest management activities. Hunting and fishing are popular in the area, and equestrian users ride gated roads in the area. There are rock climbing routes on the granite faces, and many trails for hiking and mountain biking. Mountain bike trail opportunities on the Pisgah Ranger District are considered a recreation and ecotourism destination by many in the cycling community, and mountain bike trails within the Cedar Rock Mountain area are highly valued by that user group. The Bracken Mountain Trail was developed under a partnership with the city of Brevard. The area is frequently utilized by outfitters and guides, as well as for recreation events. The area has extensive use by special use permittees, often in large groups.

Portions of the Cedar Rock Mountain area are managed as John Rock Scenic Area and Art Loeb National Recreation Trail corridor. The area is also managed for timber and wildlife habitat, and there are several low maintenance-level roads (closed to motorized access), maintained wildlife fields, and recent vegetation management treatments. There is also a powerline that runs along NFSR 471.

Evaluation of Wilderness Characteristics

Apparent Naturalness

Forests in this area have been heavily logged in the past and also have more recent vegetation management treatments with associated low maintenance-level roads; however, there are remote

locations where the forest is more natural appearing. Visitors using NFS trails in this area are likely to encounter low maintenance-level roads, heavily used mountain bike trails, maintained wildlife openings, and vegetation management treatments. Constructed features in the area include a water diversion structure along Cedar Rock Creek, a shelter on Art Loeb Trail, numerous road culverts, and powerlines all of which detract from the naturalness of the area. Located east of John Rock are Picklesimer Fields which includes a series of streams, shallow ponds, and fields that were created through historic uses and recent beaver activity.

Opportunities for Solitude or Primitive & Unconfined Recreation

While opportunities for solitude exist in remote locations of the area, there are many miles of heavily used trails where encounters with other forest visitors are a high probability throughout the year. The adjacent Pisgah Center for Wildlife Education serves as a popular trailhead for mountain bikers, hikers, rock climbers, hunters, and fishermen, as do other trailheads around the area's perimeter. Sights and sounds of civilization are evident from many locations, and downtown Brevard is only four miles from the area's highest peak, Cedar Rock Mountain.

There are many opportunities for primitive and unconfined recreation in the area. The Art Loeb National Recreation Trail passes through the area. This trail is popular with school and camp groups for multi-day backpacking trips, often these groups contain 20 or more participants which would affect opportunities for solitude. The many rock outcrops and cliffs attract rock climbers, while area streams and managed forests provide fishing and hunting opportunities. The area also contains several miles of mountain bike trails, which are not considered a primitive type of recreation.

Other Values - Unique or Outstanding Qualities

John Rock is currently managed as a Forest Scenic Area. The granitic dome geology and associated ecosystems of Cedar Rock Mountain and John Rock are unique within the local area, but are part of a larger geologic group of mountains extending southwest into South Carolina.

Size & Manageability

At more than 8,000 acres, the Cedar Rock area is of sufficient size to preserve existing wilderness characteristics. Area boundaries are generally consolidated and follow open roads and national forest ownership boundaries. There is an exclusion extending into the area around Kuykendall Group Camp and its access road (NFSR 2058) in the southern part of the area, but no non-federal inholdings exist within the area.

Summary

Opportunities for solitude in the Cedar Rock area would be limited due to the high amount of diverse recreation use and abundance of trails throughout the area. Naturalness of the area is compromised by recent vegetation management, mowed linear wildlife fields, a powerline corridor, and well developed trails and constructed features that occur throughout the area.

Quantitative Summary of Items/Activities within the Cedar Rock Mountain Area

Disclaimer: Information was generated from FS spatial datasets. All figures are approximate.

Description of Area	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Spruce-Fir Ecozone:	acres	0
Northern Hardwood Ecozone:	acres	0.9
High Elevation Red Oak Ecozone:	acres	17.4
Acidic Cove Ecozone:	acres	1,944.1
Rich Cove Ecozone:	acres	1,065.2
Mesic Oak Ecozone:	acres	535.8
Dry-Mesic Oak Ecozone:	acres	3,857.4
Dry Oak Ecozone:	acres	560.8
Pine-Oak/Heath Ecozone:	acres	650.2
Shortleaf Pine Ecozone:	acres	46.9
Alluvial Forest Ecozone:	acres	0

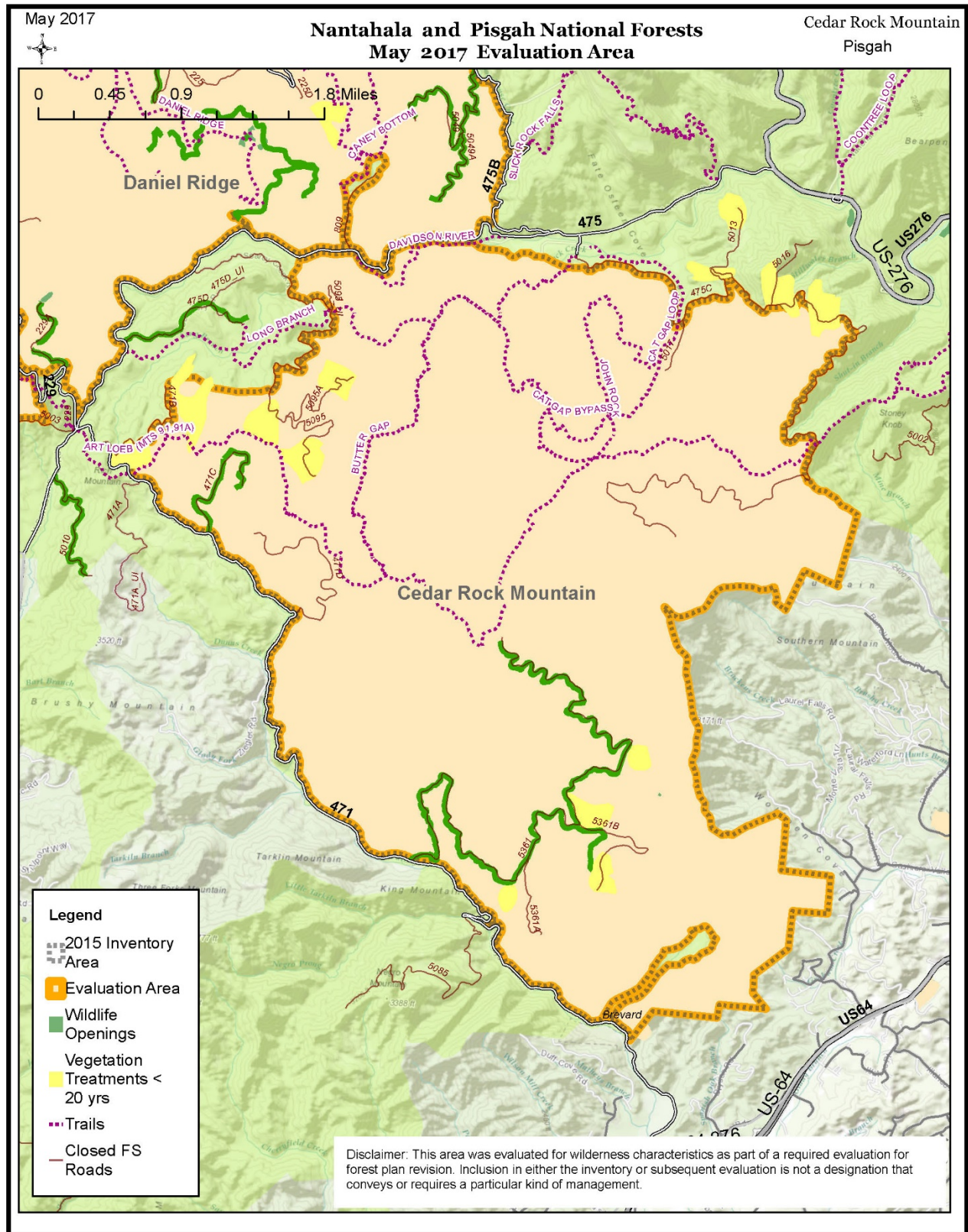
Apparent Naturalness	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Maintenance Level 1 National Forest System Roads:	miles	4.5
Closed Maintenance Level 2 National Forest System Roads:	miles	7.5
Road Stream Crossings, Bridge:	number	0
Road Stream Crossings, Other:	number	4
Trail Stream Crossings, Bridge:	number	5
Vegetation Management, 0-20 years old:	acres	177.6
Vegetation Management, 21-40 years old:	acres	672.2
Maintained Wildlife Fields (may overlap Bald Management Area):	acres	14.1
Existing Wilderness Study Area (WSA):	acres	0
Existing Inventoried Roadless Area (IRA may overlap WSA):	acres	0

Solitude or Primitive & Unconfined Recreation	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Current Backcountry Management Area (may overlap WSA & IRA):	acres	0
Inventoried Primitive Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) Setting:	acres	0
Inventoried Semi-Primitive Non-Motorized ROS Setting:	acres	1,098.1

	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Solitude or Primitive & Unconfined Recreation		
Inventoried Semi-Primitive Motorized ROS Setting (buffer of adjacent roads):	acres	2,672.2
Inventoried Roded Natural ROS Setting (buffer of adjacent roads):	acres	4,911.4
National Forest System Trail, Hike-only Allowed Use:	miles	10.4
National Forest System Trail, Hike-Bike Allowed Use:	miles	7.4
National Forest System Trail, Hike-Horse Allowed Use:	miles	0
National Forest System Trail, Hike-Bike-Horse Allowed Use:	miles	0

	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Unique & Outstanding Features		
Current Special Interest Management Area (scenic, geologic, botanical, zoological):	acres	501.2
Current Designated Wild & Scenic River Corridor (1/4 mile each side):	acres	0
Current Eligible Wild & Scenic River Corridor (1/4 mile each side):	acres	389.2
Research Natural Area:	acres	0

	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Size & Manageability		
Area, Total:	acres	8,681.7
Private/Non-Federal Inholdings, Total:	acres	0
Private/Non-Federal Inholdings, Count:	number	0
Outstanding or Reserved Subsurface Mineral Rights:	acres	0
Current Bald Management Area:	acres	0
Forest Research Plots, Count:	number	12



Name: Daniel Ridge

Acres: 11,695 acres

Description of Area

Location & Access

The Daniel Ridge area is located in Transylvania County, and lies between Davidson River Road (NFSR475) and the Blue Ridge Parkway; east of NC215 and west of Headwaters Road (NFSR475B). Area boundaries are generally contiguous with one narrow protrusion to the northeast along the Blue Ridge Parkway, and exclusions around Cove Creek Group Camp, and open Forest Service Roads 137, 225, 229, and 809. The area can be accessed from these roads and trailheads at Cove Creek, Daniel Ridge, Gloucester Gap, Courthouse Creek, Case Camp Ridge, Headwaters Road, and multiple locations along the Blue Ridge Parkway.

Surroundings

The northern boundary is adjacent to federal lands of the Blue Ridge Parkway, and all other boundaries are adjacent to national forest system lands.

Topography & Vegetation

Parts of this area have steep and rugged terrain, with elevations ranging from 2,400 feet along the Davidson River to over 5,400 feet at the Blue Ridge Parkway near Devil's Courthouse. The area is dominated by the Pisgah Ridge to the north, where the Blue Ridge Parkway snakes between peaks just outside the area. A prominent landmark within the area is Pilot Mountain, at an elevation of over 5,080 feet. The area also has several other peaks and ridges over 4,000 feet and contains the headwaters of the North Fork French Broad and Davidson Rivers. A broad range of ecozones are represented in this area, including acidic cove, rich cove, dry-mesic oak, dry-oak, northern hardwoods, northern red oak, and some spruce-fir at the highest elevations.

Current Uses

The area contains a range of dispersed recreation opportunities and forest management activities. Developed dispersed campsites are present along Courthouse Creek Road. Hunting and fishing are popular in the area, and equestrian users frequently ride on gated roads. There are rock climbing routes, dispersed camping, and many trails for hiking and mountain biking. Mountain bike trail opportunities on the Pisgah Ranger District are considered a recreation and ecotourism destination by many in the cycling community, and mountain bike trails within the Daniel Ridge area are highly valued by that user group. Numerous permits for outfitters and guides, as well as recreation events are issued in this area. Utility powerlines are present along NFSR 475. The area has extensive use by special use permittees, often in large groups.

Part of the Daniel Ridge area includes the Art Loeb National Recreation Trail corridor. The area is also managed for timber and wildlife habitat, and there are several low maintenance-level roads (closed to motorized access), maintained wildlife fields, concrete and steel vehicular bridges, constructed trail shelters, and recent vegetation management treatments.

Evaluation of Wilderness Characteristics

Apparent Naturalness

Although many locations within the area are natural appearing, these forests have been heavily logged in the past and contain recent wildlife habitat improvements and vegetation management activities. Maintained wildlife fields and low maintenance-level roads are commonly seen in the east, west and south; many of which are well established. Constructed features include remnants of the old trout rearing station along Davidson River, a shelter on Art Loeb Trail, trail bridges, numerous road culverts, and bear hanging devices (designed to protect food and gear from bears and reduce bear encounters). There are heavily used mountain bike trails throughout the area which detract from naturalness.

Opportunities for Solitude or Primitive & Unconfined Recreation

While opportunities for solitude exist in remote coves and steep slopes in the area, there are many miles of heavily used trails where encounters with other forest visitors are a high probability throughout the year. Mountain bikers, hikers, rock climbers, hunters and fishermen access the area from multiple trailhead parking lots around the perimeter, which are often filled to capacity. Sights and sounds of civilization are evident from locations along the periphery of the area near NC215, Davidson River Road, Headwaters Road, Courthouse Falls, Cove Creek Group Campground, and the Blue Ridge Parkway. From many locations within the area, the Blue Ridge Parkway is visible on the high ridge along the northern boundary; including cut rock faces and permanent vista openings; however, these sights and sounds are not pervasive throughout the area.

There are many opportunities for primitive and unconfined recreation in the area. The Art Loeb National Recreation Trail passes through the area. This trail is popular with school and camp groups for multi-day backpacking trips, often these groups contain 20 or more participants which would affect opportunities for solitude. The many rock outcrops and cliffs attract climbers, while area streams and managed forests provide fishing and hunting opportunities. The area also contains several miles of mountain bike trails which is not considered a primitive form of recreation.

Other Values - Unique or Outstanding Qualities

There is a designated large patch of old growth within the area as well as a population of the rare and endemic Pinkshell azalea. There are many scenic waterfalls in the area including Daniel Ridge/Tom's Spring Falls and Courthouse Falls; however, they are common within the context of the Southern Appalachian Mountains, and not particularly unique. Other water resources include the headwaters of the North Fork French Broad and Davidson Rivers, the latter of which is an eligible Wild and Scenic River. There are two State Natural Heritage Areas within the Daniel Ridge Area.

Size & Manageability

At 11,695 acres, the Daniel Ridge area is large enough to manage in an unimpaired condition; however, area boundaries are fairly irregular and cherry-stem around multiple open roads and developed recreation facilities in the area. The Blue Ridge Parkway parallels the entire northern boundary and lies along the highest ridge above the area, where sights and sounds of the roadway are evident from many locations. With the exception of the border along the Blue Ridge Parkway, the area is completely surrounded by National Forest System lands.

Summary

While unroaded portions of the Daniel Ridge area have some degree of wilderness characteristics, heavy recreation use, abundant infrastructure, and recent vegetation management all negatively impact

naturalness and opportunities for solitude across much of the area. The area is of sufficient size to manage as wilderness, but has irregular boundaries with open roads cherry-stemmed out of the area that would make managing for wilderness characteristics difficult. The Daniel Ridge area has outstanding scenic attributes, water resources, and rare plant communities, but these are not outstandingly unique in the Southern Appalachian Mountains.

Quantitative Summary of Items/Activities within the Daniel Ridge Area

Disclaimer: Information was generated from FS spatial datasets. All figures are approximate.

Description of Area	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Spruce-Fir Ecozone:	acres	240.8
Northern Hardwood Ecozone:	acres	412.4
High Elevation Red Oak Ecozone:	acres	2,856.4
Acidic Cove Ecozone:	acres	2,750.7
Rich Cove Ecozone:	acres	1,231.8
Mesic Oak Ecozone:	acres	994.3
Dry-Mesic Oak Ecozone:	acres	2,106.8
Dry Oak Ecozone:	acres	936.3
Pine-Oak/Heath Ecozone:	acres	158.9
Shortleaf Pine Ecozone:	acres	1.4
Alluvial Forest Ecozone:	acres	0

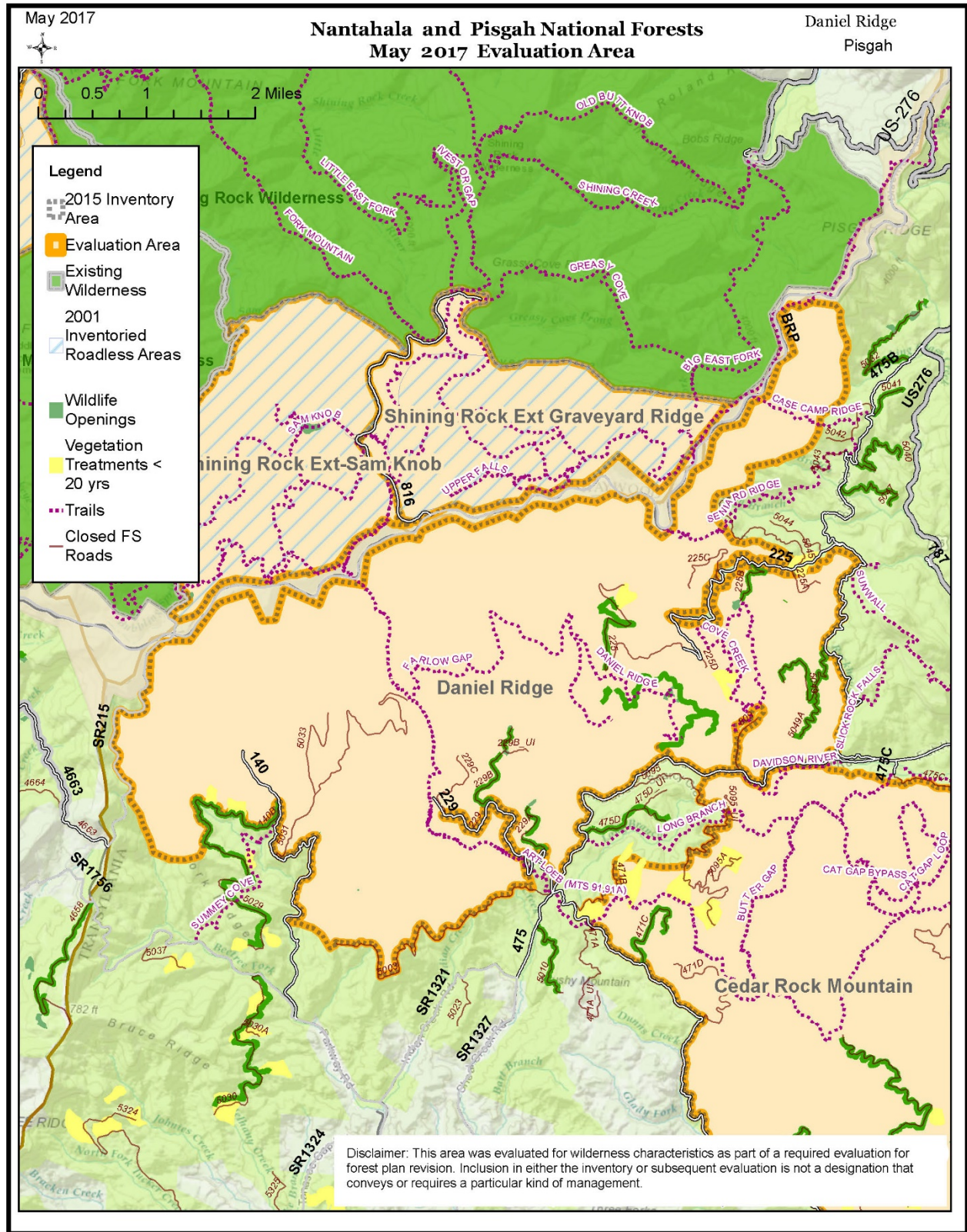
Apparent Naturalness	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Maintenance Level 1 National Forest System Roads:	miles	5.5
Closed Maintenance Level 2 National Forest System Roads:	miles	8.6
Road Stream Crossings, Bridge:	number	1
Road Stream Crossings, Other:	number	12
Trail Stream Crossings, Bridge:	number	16
Vegetation Management, 0-20 years old:	acres	63.4
Vegetation Management, 21-40 years old:	acres	737.2
Maintained Wildlife Fields (may overlap Bald Management Area):	acres	25.8
Existing Wilderness Study Area (WSA):	acres	0
Existing Inventoried Roadless Area (IRA may overlap WSA):	acres	0

Solitude or Primitive & Unconfined Recreation	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Current Backcountry Management Area (may overlap WSA & IRA):	acres	0
Inventoried Primitive Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) Setting:	acres	0
Inventoried Semi-Primitive Non-Motorized ROS Setting:	acres	1,181.6

	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Solitude or Primitive & Unconfined Recreation		
Inventoried Semi-Primitive Motorized ROS Setting (buffer of adjacent roads):	acres	2,953.4
Inventoried Roded Natural ROS Setting (buffer of adjacent roads):	acres	7,457.3
National Forest System Trail, Hike-only Allowed Use:	miles	6.1
National Forest System Trail, Hike-Bike Allowed Use:	miles	10.4
National Forest System Trail, Hike-Horse Allowed Use:	miles	0
National Forest System Trail, Hike-Bike-Horse Allowed Use:	miles	0

	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Unique & Outstanding Features		
Current Special Interest Management Area (scenic, geologic, botanical, zoological):	acres	0.3
Current Designated Wild & Scenic River Corridor (1/4 mile each side):	acres	0
Current Eligible Wild & Scenic River Corridor (1/4 mile each side):	acres	604.1
Research Natural Area:	acres	0

	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Size & Manageability		
Area, Total:	acres	11,694.8
Private/Non-Federal Inholdings, Total:	acres	0
Private/Non-Federal Inholdings, Count:	number	0
Outstanding or Reserved Subsurface Mineral Rights:	acres	0
Current Bald Management Area:	acres	0
Forest Research Plots, Count:	number	1



Name: Laurel Mountain

Acres: 10,946

Description of Area

Location & Access

The Laurel Mountain area is located in Transylvania and Henderson Counties, and lies between the Blue Ridge Parkway to the north and Yellow Gap Road (NFSR1206) to the south; east of Dividing Ridge and west of Trace Ridge, Coffee Pot Mt., and Wash Creek Road (NFSR5000). Access to the area is from several trailheads along Yellow Gap Road, Wash Creek Road, and the Blue Ridge Parkway.

Surroundings

Area boundaries are generally contiguous, with one large protrusion to the east. The northern boundary is adjacent to federal lands of the Blue Ridge Parkway and other boundaries are adjacent to National Forest System lands; with one small exception of private land near Mills River Campground. Developed recreation sites on adjacent lands outside the area include Wash Creek Horse Camp, Wolf Ford Horse Camp, Mills River Campground, Trace Ridge Trailhead, the Blue Ridge Parkway and its overlooks, Mount Pisgah campground, the Pisgah Inn and store, and the Buck Springs Lodge site.

Topography & Vegetation

Parts of this area have steep and rugged terrain, with elevations ranging from 2,240 feet along the North Mills River to over 5,000 feet at the Blue Ridge Parkway near Little Bald Mountain. The area is dominated by the Pisgah Ridge to the northwest, where the Blue Ridge Parkway snakes between peaks just outside the area. Another prominent ridge is Laurel Mountain, with several peaks over 4,000 feet. Pilot Rock is a distinctive feature, as the northern-most granitic dome on the Pisgah Ranger District. A broad range of ecozones are represented in this area, including acidic cove, rich cove, dry-mesic oak, dry-oak, northern hardwoods, and northern red oak.

Current Uses

The area contains a range of dispersed recreation opportunities and forest management activities. Hunting is popular in the area and there are many low maintenance-level roads, maintained wildlife openings, and recent vegetation treatments, primarily on the eastern side of the area. Fishing is popular in the North Mills River and its tributaries.

There are rock climbing routes on the granite faces, and many trails for hiking, mountain biking, and horseback riding. This area (and South Mills River) has a concentration of horse trails with nearby equestrian campgrounds and trailheads. The area is also very popular with mountain bikers. Trail riding opportunities on the Pisgah Ranger District are considered a recreation and ecotourism destination by many in the cycling and equestrian communities, and trails within the area are highly valued by those user groups. Permits for outfitters and guides, as well as recreation events are issued in this area, often in large groups.

Approximately 3,200 acres of this area is currently managed for a backcountry recreation experience. The area also includes 5,682 acres of the Laurel Mountain Inventoried Roadless Area, which overlaps the backcountry management area.

Evaluation of Wilderness Characteristics

Apparent Naturalness

Many locations in the Laurel Mountain area have a natural appearance; however, these forests have been logged in the past and also contain recent vegetation and wildlife habitat management activities in the area outside of the Inventoried Roadless Area. Low maintenance-level roads and maintained wildlife openings are commonly seen in the north and southeast; many of them are well established and drivable. There are heavily used mountain bike and equestrian trails throughout the area. Constructed features include the Hendersonville Reservoir, a backup water source for the town of Hendersonville, trail bridges, and numerous road culverts, all of which detract from naturalness in their immediate vicinity.

Opportunities for Solitude or Primitive & Unconfined Recreation

While opportunities for solitude exist in remote coves and steep slopes throughout the area, there are many miles of heavily used trails where encounters with other forest visitors are a high probability throughout the year. The nearby Trace Ridge Trailhead, Wash Creek Horse Camp, and Mills River Recreation Area serve as popular access points for mountain bikers, hikers, horseback riders, rock climbers, hunters and fishermen; as do other trailheads around the area's perimeter and along the Blue Ridge Parkway. Sights and sounds of civilization are evident from many locations near the Blue Ridge Parkway, Yellow Gap Road (NFSR1206), Wash Creek Road (NFSR5000), and adjacent developed recreation areas.

There are many opportunities for primitive and unconfined recreation in the area. Rock outcrops and cliffs attract climbers, hikers frequent the area, and there are hunting and fishing opportunities across the area. The Laurel Mountain area is known for its equestrian and mountain bike trails; the latter of which is not considered a primitive type of recreation.

Other Values - Unique or Outstanding Qualities

This area is highly prized for its scenic attributes; however, these features are common within the context of the Southern Appalachian Mountains, and not particularly unique.

The area contains the headwaters and several miles of the North Mills River, an eligible Wild and Scenic River. There are three State Natural Heritage Areas within the Laurel Mountain Area.

Size & Manageability

At 10,946 acres, the Laurel Mountain area is of sufficient size to be managed in an unimpaired condition, within a core Inventoried Roadless Area of 5,682 acres. Area boundaries are relatively contiguous, with one large protrusion to the east. The Blue Ridge Parkway parallels the entire northern boundary and lies along the highest ridge above the area, where sights and sounds of the roadway are evident from many locations, including the core Inventoried Roadless Area. All other boundaries are adjacent to National Forest System lands, with the exception of a small inholding off of NFSR 1206 on the far eastern boundary of the area.

Summary

The Laurel Creek area contains evidence of past and current human modification, has high visitor use, and a water supply reservoir that detract from naturalness. There are opportunities for solitude and primitive recreation, particularly in the core interior of the area within the Inventoried Roadless Area. High recreation use on area trails and sights or sounds from adjacent open roads detract from opportunities for solitude along the periphery of the area.

Quantitative Summary of Items/Activities within the Laurel Mountain Area

Disclaimer: Information was generated from FS spatial datasets. All figures are approximate.

Description of Area	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Spruce-Fir Ecozone:	acres	16.9
Northern Hardwood Ecozone:	acres	490.9
High Elevation Red Oak Ecozone:	acres	416.2
Acidic Cove Ecozone:	acres	3,721.5
Rich Cove Ecozone:	acres	2,634.9
Mesic Oak Ecozone:	acres	2,307.3
Dry-Mesic Oak Ecozone:	acres	166.4
Dry Oak Ecozone:	acres	39.0
Pine-Oak/Heath Ecozone:	acres	972.3
Shortleaf Pine Ecozone:	acres	176.7
Alluvial Forest Ecozone:	acres	0.1

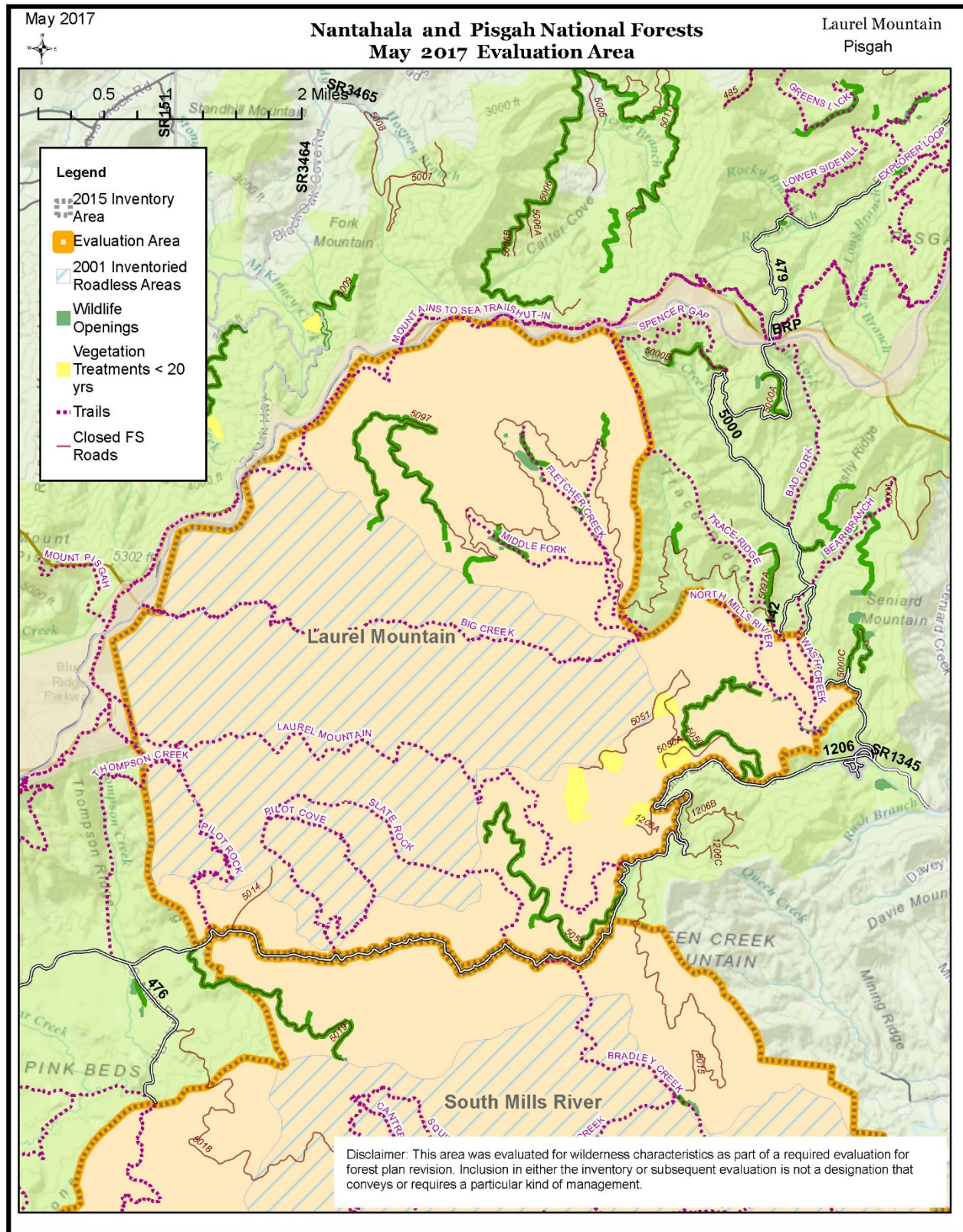
Apparent Naturalness	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Maintenance Level 1 National Forest System Roads:	miles	4.6
Closed Maintenance Level 2 National Forest System Roads:	miles	4.5
Road Stream Crossings, Bridge:	number	0
Road Stream Crossings, Other:	number	17
Trail Stream Crossings, Bridge:	number	11
Vegetation Management, 0-20 years old:	acres	119.7
Vegetation Management, 21-40 years old:	acres	410.3
Maintained Wildlife Fields (may overlap Bald Management Area):	acres	27.4
Existing Wilderness Study Area (WSA):	acres	0
Existing Inventoried Roadless Area (IRA may overlap WSA):	acres	5,679.9

Solitude or Primitive & Unconfined Recreation	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Current Backcountry Management Area (may overlap WSA & IRA):	acres	3,259.5
Inventoried Primitive Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) Setting:	acres	0
Inventoried Semi-Primitive Non-Motorized ROS Setting:	acres	3,247.6

	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Solitude or Primitive & Unconfined Recreation		
Inventoried Semi-Primitive Motorized ROS Setting (buffer of adjacent roads):	acres	3,460.6
Inventoried Roded Natural ROS Setting (buffer of adjacent roads):	acres	4,237.2
National Forest System Trail, Hike-only Allowed Use:	miles	2.4
National Forest System Trail, Hike-Bike Allowed Use:	miles	16.3
National Forest System Trail, Hike-Horse Allowed Use:	miles	0
National Forest System Trail, Hike-Bike-Horse Allowed Use:	miles	15.9

	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Unique & Outstanding Features		
Current Special Interest Management Area (scenic, geologic, botanical, zoological):	acres	0
Current Designated Wild & Scenic River Corridor (1/4 mile each side):	acres	0
Current Eligible Wild & Scenic River Corridor (1/4 mile each side):	acres	544.0
Research Natural Area:	acres	0

	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Size & Manageability		
Area, Total:	acres	10,945.5
Private/Non-Federal Inholdings, Total:	acres	0
Private/Non-Federal Inholdings, Count:	number	0
Outstanding or Reserved Subsurface Mineral Rights:	acres	0
Current Bald Management Area:	acres	0
Forest Research Plots, Count:33	number	13



Name: Middle Prong Wilderness Extension

Acres: 6,676 acres

Description of Area

Location & Access

The Middle Prong Extension area is adjacent to and a potential extension of the congressionally designated Middle Prong Wilderness on the Pisgah Ranger District on the Pisgah NF. The area is near Sunburst Recreation Area in Haywood County and lies between Middle Prong Wilderness to the south, Lickstone Ridge to the west, Lickstone Road (NFSR97) to the east, and Beauty Spring Knob to the north. Access to the area is from Haywood Gap Trail (NFST142) and the seasonally open NFSR97, which is off of NC215.

Surroundings

Area boundaries form a long narrow peninsula from Middle Prong Wilderness in the south and extend north approximately 7.8 miles. At the narrowest point, the area is 0.7 miles wide. The irregular eastern boundary follows NFSR 97 which is an open road. There are two non-federal inholdings in the northeastern area. Southern boundaries are adjacent to Middle Prong Wilderness. Part of the eastern boundary is adjacent to other national forest system lands, while all remaining boundaries to the northeast, north, and west are adjacent to private or municipal lands.

Over Lickstone Ridge to the west is the municipal watershed for the town of Waynesville, and a housing development further north with residential properties immediately adjacent to the area. In the West Fork Pigeon River valley to the east along NC 215 are commercial and residential properties, a church retreat at Lake Logan, and a Forest Service campground. At its nearest point, the Blue Ridge Parkway is 0.4 miles to the southwest but is on the opposite side of Richland Balsam. A portion of the Blue Ridge Parkway is visible from the area near Reinhart Knob, as seen across the adjacent Middle Prong Wilderness.

Topography & Vegetation

The Middle Prong Extension area is primarily an east-facing slope, from Lickstone Ridge in the west down toward West Fork Pigeon River valley to the east. Views to the west are shielded by Lickstone Ridge, but sights and sounds of NC215 and non-federal lands to the east are evident. Most of the area has steep and rugged terrain, especially near the high ridges. Elevations range from 2,880 feet near Nick Creek, to 6,360 feet on Lickstone Ridge near Richland Balsam. Much of Lickstone Ridge is over 5,000 feet in elevation. The mid and lower elevations are predominately hardwood forests, but on the higher elevations to the southwest there are remnants of spruce-fir forests and heath balds. Ecozones within the area include acidic cove, rich cove, high-elevation red oak, northern hardwoods, and spruce-fir.

Current Uses

The Middle Prong Extension area is managed primarily for timber and wildlife, and there are many past vegetation treatments visible along NFSR97 and its spur roads. Some of the low maintenance-level spur roads and older vegetation treatments are within the area boundaries. The area is popular for hunting, and Lickstone Road (NFSR97) is open seasonally to provide access and there are old water system buildings off this road. There are fishing opportunities in area streams, especially in Middle Prong. The area also has extensive use by special use permittees, often in large groups.

Other uses in the area include hiking, backpacking, nature viewing, and gathering forest products. There are two hike-only trails in the area: Haywood Gap Trail (NFST142) which follows NFSR 97H to Middle Prong Wilderness; and Green Mountain Trail which follows the ridge along Middle Prong Wilderness boundary. There are no designated equestrian or mountain bike trails in the area. Approximately 1,852 acres of the proposed extension area includes the Middle Prong Inventoried Roadless Area.

Evaluation of Wilderness Characteristics

Apparent Naturalness

The Middle Prong Extension area has been logged in the past and evidence of old logging roads and railroad grades are still visible on the ground in some areas. Many of the old railroad routes have recovered to some degree and are less evident on the landscape. The mid-slope hardwood forests to the north have undergone recent vegetation management resulting in some early successional habitat. Low maintenance-level NFS roads and temporary roads used to harvest timber are present and affect naturalness in their immediate vicinity.

In the Inventoried Roadless Area in the southern portion of the area, there are NFS roads which were old logging roads added to the system in the late 1980s; two are unmaintained and one is used as Haywood Gap Trail into Middle Prong Wilderness. There are no highly developed trails or structures in the area. Portions of the area along Lickstone Ridge have old growth forest, and despite damage from Balsam woolly adelgid, the high-elevation spruce-fir forests to the southwest retain a natural appearance.

Opportunities for Solitude or Primitive & Unconfined Recreation

There are many locations within the interior of the area with opportunities for solitude; however there are also impacts to solitude from adjacent lands along the periphery. Sights and sounds of civilization are evident in the West Fork Pigeon River valley and along NC215. Housing developments on the west side of Lickstone Ridge extend all the way to the national forest boundary. Occasional traffic on NFSR97 and sounds from activities on the private inholdings, a nearby shooting range, and Lake Logan retreat may also be heard but these impacts are not pervasive across the area. The southern portion of the area is an Inventoried Roadless Area which is bordered by national forest lands to the east, a municipal watershed to the west, and Middle Prong Wilderness to the south. The best opportunities for solitude and unconfined recreation are in the Inventoried Roadless Area adjacent to Middle Prong Wilderness.

The area has opportunities for primitive and unconfined recreation including limited hike only trails; however, the narrowness of the area and close proximity to private lands in the northern half of the area impacts opportunities for unconfined recreation. The most common recreation uses in the area include hunting, hiking, backpacking, nature viewing, and fishing.

Other Values - Unique and Outstanding Qualities

Lickstone Ridge originates at Richland Balsam in the southwestern corner of the area. At 6,410 feet in elevation, Richland Balsam is the tallest mountain in the Great Balsam Range (and the highest point on the nearby Blue Ridge Parkway). The spruce-fir forest on this high ridge is one of just ten remaining spruce-fir communities in the Southern Appalachian Mountains. Like the high-elevation ecosystem on Mt. Mitchell, the remnant spruce-fir forests of Richland Balsam and Lickstone Ridge are unique and outstanding. There is one State Natural Heritage Areas within the Middle Prong Extension area.

Size & Manageability

The northern half of the area has irregular boundaries with several small protrusions, two non-federal inholdings, and a long narrow shape that exposes more area to sights and sounds of adjacent private

lands. The southern half of the area is bordered by other national forest lands and a municipal watershed. Sights and sounds of NC215 would be evident, but to a lesser extent than the northern half.

Further south, in the Inventoried Roadless Area, sights of NC215 are largely shielded by topography. A portion of the Blue Ridge Parkway is evident from this location, but it lies beyond the adjacent Middle Prong Wilderness. The 1,852 acre Inventoried Roadless Area is immediately adjacent to Middle Prong Wilderness, and would be considered as a potential extension to the wilderness. The entire area has outstanding subsurface mineral rights, as does Middle Prong Wilderness.

Summary

Due to the area shape, configuration, and adjacent land uses, the northern half of the Middle Prong Extension has a lower degree of wilderness characteristics than the area within the Inventoried Roadless Area and adjacent to Middle Prong Wilderness. There are low maintenance level roads in the area immediately adjacent to Middle Prong Wilderness that detract from naturalness, but sights and sounds of civilization are less evident compared to the northern section.

Quantitative Summary of Items/Activities within the Middle Prong Wilderness Extension Area

Disclaimer: Information was generated from FS spatial datasets. All figures are approximate.

Description of Area	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Spruce-Fir Ecozone:	acres	189.9
Northern Hardwood Ecozone:	acres	1,371.0
High Elevation Red Oak Ecozone:	acres	1,062.8
Acidic Cove Ecozone:	acres	1,027.6
Rich Cove Ecozone:	acres	1,419.0
Mesic Oak Ecozone:	acres	1,479.8
Dry-Mesic Oak Ecozone:	acres	0
Dry Oak Ecozone:	acres	4.9
Pine-Oak/Heath Ecozone:	acres	106.7
Shortleaf Pine Ecozone:	acres	0
Alluvial Forest Ecozone:	acres	0

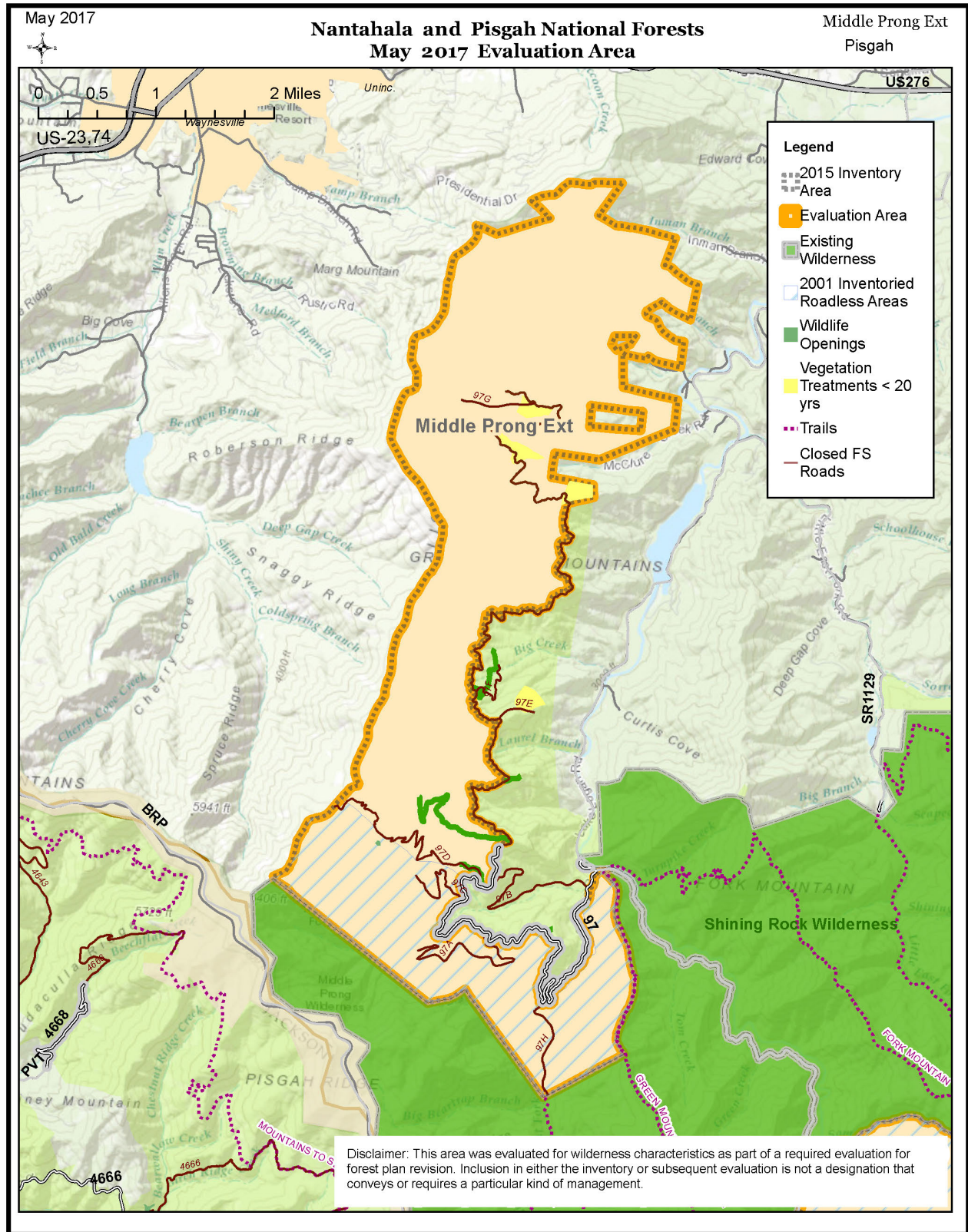
Apparent Naturalness	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Maintenance Level 1 National Forest System Roads:	miles	6.8
Closed Maintenance Level 2 National Forest System Roads:	miles	0
Road Stream Crossings, Bridge:	number	0
Road Stream Crossings, Other:	number	7
Trail Stream Crossings, Bridge:	number	0
Vegetation Management, 0-20 years old:	acres	69.2
Vegetation Management, 21-40 years old:	acres	68.8
Maintained Wildlife Fields (may overlap Bald Management Area):	acres	4.4
Existing Wilderness Study Area (WSA):	acres	0
Existing Inventoried Roadless Area (IRA may overlap WSA):	acres	1,802.5

Solitude or Primitive & Unconfined Recreation	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Current Backcountry Management Area (may overlap WSA & IRA):	acres	0
Inventoried Primitive Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) Setting:	acres	0

	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Solitude or Primitive & Unconfined Recreation		
Inventoried Semi-Primitive Non-Motorized ROS Setting:	acres	1,877.1
Inventoried Semi-Primitive Motorized ROS Setting (buffer of adjacent roads):	acres	838.1
Inventoried Roaded Natural ROS Setting (buffer of adjacent roads):	acres	3,957.4
National Forest System Trail, Hike-only Allowed Use:	miles	1.2
National Forest System Trail, Hike-Bike Allowed Use:	miles	0
National Forest System Trail, Hike-Horse Allowed Use:	miles	0
National Forest System Trail, Hike-Bike-Horse Allowed Use:	miles	0

	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Unique & Outstanding Features		
Current Special Interest Management Area (scenic, geologic, botanical, zoological):	acres	0
Current Designated Wild & Scenic River Corridor (1/4 mile each side):	acres	0
Current Eligible Wild & Scenic River Corridor (1/4 mile each side):	acres	0
Research Natural Area:	acres	0

	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Size & Manageability		
Area, Total:	acres	6,675.6
Private/Non-Federal Inholdings, Total:	acres	56.3
Private/Non-Federal Inholdings, Count:	number	2
Outstanding or Reserved Subsurface Mineral Rights:	acres	6,319.1
Current Bald Management Area:	acres	0
Forest Research Plots, Count:	number	3



Name: Shining Rock Wilderness Extension – Graveyard Ridge

Acres: 2,339 acres

Description of Area

Location & Access

The Graveyard Ridge area is adjacent to the congressionally designated Shining Rock Wilderness on the Pisgah Ranger District in the Pisgah NF. The area is in Haywood County, NC, and lies between Shining Rock Wilderness at Ivester Ridge to the north; the Blue Ridge Parkway to the south and east; and Black Balsam Road (NFSR 816) and Ivester Gap Trail to the west. Access to the area is from Art Loeb and Black Balsam trailheads along NFSR 816, and from the Blue Ridge Parkway at Looking Glass Rock and Graveyard Fields Overlooks.

Surroundings

Area boundaries are generally contiguous, with a narrow “neck” to the northwest sandwiched between NFSR 816 and Shining Rock Wilderness. When considered with the potential Sam Knob extension to the west, NFSR 816 forms a narrow excluded corridor from the Blue Ridge Parkway north to Black Balsam trailhead and continues to Shining Rock Wilderness boundary along Ivester Gap Trail; which is also open seasonally to motorized vehicles. The northern boundary is adjacent to National Forest System lands of Shining Rock Wilderness and federal lands of the Blue Ridge Parkway to the south and west.

Developed recreation areas on adjacent national forest lands outside the area include the heavily used Black Balsam Trailhead, Art Loeb Trailhead, and the Graveyard Fields Overlook and trails. Both NFSR 816 and the Blue Ridge Parkway are on ridges adjacent to and above the area, and sights and sounds of vehicular traffic are evident, especially south of Graveyard Ridge.

Topography & Vegetation

The Graveyard Ridge area contains a high-elevation valley at Graveyard Fields, surrounded by ridges and knobs. It has steep and rugged slopes, and rocky drops on Yellowstone Prong and Dark Prong. Elevations range from 4,100 feet along the East Fork Pigeon River, to 6,214 feet at Black Balsam Knob. Heath balds such as Black Balsam Knob, Tennent Mountain, and the “meadows” of Graveyard Fields are interspersed with mountain laurel, blueberry bushes, and patches of northern hardwood trees. On the west slopes of Black Balsam Knob there is a spruce-fir plantation. The area was once dominated by spruce-fir forest, but historic logging and severe wildfires created the more open conditions seen today. Ecozones within the area include high-elevation red oak, northern hardwoods, and spruce-fir.

Current Uses

The Graveyard Ridge area contains a range of dispersed recreation opportunities, but its primary attractions are day hiking, backpacking, viewing scenery, and fishing. The Mountains to Sea Trail and Art Loeb Trail are popular National Recreation Trails in the area. Current vegetation and habitat management includes maintenance of the balds in a portion of the area. The area also has extensive use by special use permittees, often in large groups.

There are several miles of hiking trails accessed from the popular Blue Ridge Parkway’s Graveyard Fields overlook, which is a destination for day hikers, backpackers, blueberry pickers, and sightseers seeking waterfalls and fall foliage. Graveyard Ridge Trail is open to horses and bicycles, which connects to Ivester Gap Trail and Black Balsam trailhead. Fishing is popular in Yellowstone Prong Dark Prong, and East Fork

Pigeon River; all three of which are eligible Wild and Scenic Rivers. The open heath balds are popular with hunters.

Approximately 720 acres are currently managed for backcountry recreation and 1,973 acres are a designated Inventoried Roadless Area, which overlaps the backcountry management area.

Evaluation of Wilderness Characteristics

Apparent Naturalness

The Graveyard Ridge area was once covered with spruce-fir forests. After the timber was cut in the early twentieth century, there were devastating wildfires that burned logging debris and consumed the organic soil layer. Although these events altered the landscape, it eventually recovered to the natural-appearing mosaic of heath balds and forests.

The area has no NFS roads within its boundaries; however, past logging activities utilized locomotives and those railroad grades are still visible across the landscape. One of these railroad grades is now used for Graveyard Ridge Trail, which is open to horseback riders, mountain bikers, and hikers. This old railroad grade was once converted to a road then later decommissioned, now the trail has severe erosion associated with unmaintained road culverts.

Many hiking trails in the area are eroded and deeply entrenched because of overuse, lack of maintenance, and unstable soils. Improvements to the most heavily used trails in Graveyard Fields include constructed features, such as sawn-lumber boardwalks, stairs, bridges, and gravel surfacing. There is an observation platform with interpretive signage at Yellowstone Falls. The area north and east of Graveyard Ridge Trail, in the Dark Prong drainage, has less evidence of human modification and a more natural appearance.

Opportunities for Solitude or Primitive & Unconfined Recreation

With sights and sounds of the Blue Ridge Parkway immediately adjacent to the area and very heavy visitor use, opportunities for solitude are limited throughout much of the year. Graveyard Fields, Upper Falls, Yellowstone Falls, Skinny-dip Falls, Black Balsam Knob, and Tennent Mountain are attractions to tens of thousands of day hikers and backpackers every year. School, church, and camp groups frequent these areas as well, where encounters of 20-30 people at one time is not unusual during spring, summer, and fall. This heavy use is partly due to the visibility and easy access from the Blue Ridge Parkway overlooks. The exception to these impacts on solitude are in the Dark Prong drainage, where most of the area is shielded from the Blue Ridge Parkway by Graveyard Ridge.

The area has limited opportunities for primitive and unconfined recreation and there are constructed features such as handrails and signage along some trails. Hikers frequent the area and there are backpacking, hunting, fishing, camping, berry-picking, and nature viewing opportunities. Most trails are hike-only, but segments of Graveyard Ridge Trail are open to horses and bicycles.

Other Values - Unique or Outstanding Qualities

This area is popular as it is one of the most scenic places in the Pisgah NF. There are many waterfalls on East Fork Pigeon River, Yellowstone Prong, and Dark Prong; all three of which are eligible Wild and Scenic Rivers.

Size & Manageability

Graveyard Ridge area is 2,339 acres, and if recommended would be considered an extension to Shining Rock Wilderness. Area boundaries are contiguous, with one narrow extension into Shining Rock

Wilderness. Northern boundaries are adjacent to Shining Rock Wilderness, western boundaries are adjacent to other national forest system lands, and southern and eastern boundaries are adjacent to federal lands of the Blue Ridge Parkway. Sights and sounds of the Blue Ridge Parkway are evident from many locations within the area. The area contains numerous structures and other evidence of human modification, has high visitor use, and a mountain bike trail. The Dark Prong drainage has no structures, less visitor use, and more opportunities for solitude than areas south of Graveyard Ridge. The entire area has outstanding subsurface mineral rights.

Summary

The Graveyard Ridge area is a very popular recreation destination. To reduce the impact from so much use, the area has been modified to include highly developed trail structures, gravel trail surfaces, a mountain bike trail, bridges, and observation platforms, all of which impact the naturalness of the area. Opportunities for solitude are impacted by high visitor use, and sights and sounds of civilization from nearby roadways. The exception is the Dark Prong drainage east and north of Graveyard Ridge Trail, which offers opportunities for solitude, primitive recreation, and a higher degree of natural-appearing character compared to the area closest to the Blue Ridge Parkway.

Quantitative Summary of Items/Activities within the Shining Rock Wilderness Extension – Graveyard Ridge Area

Disclaimer: Information was generated from FS spatial datasets. All figures are approximate.

Description of Area	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Spruce-Fir Ecozone:	acres	489.1
Northern Hardwood Ecozone:	acres	1,211.6
High Elevation Red Oak Ecozone:	acres	208.4
Acidic Cove Ecozone:	acres	289.6
Rich Cove Ecozone:	acres	41.5
Mesic Oak Ecozone:	acres	32.3
Dry-Mesic Oak Ecozone:	acres	0
Dry Oak Ecozone:	acres	28.9
Pine-Oak/Heath Ecozone:	acres	0.3
Shortleaf Pine Ecozone:	acres	0
Alluvial Forest Ecozone:	acres	0

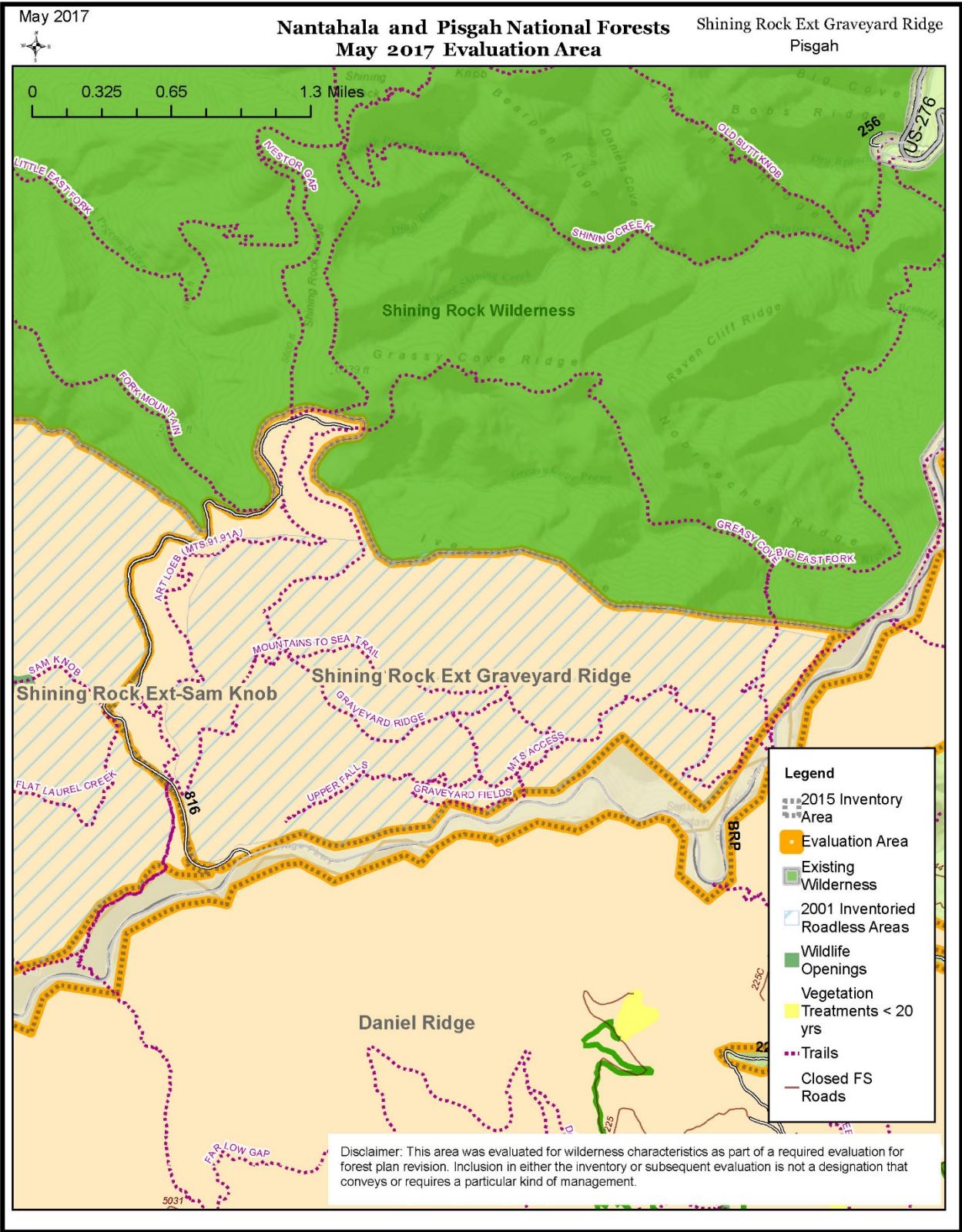
Apparent Naturalness	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Maintenance Level 1 National Forest System Roads:	miles	0
Closed Maintenance Level 2 National Forest System Roads:	miles	0
Road Stream Crossings, Bridge:	number	0
Road Stream Crossings, Other:	number	0
Trail Stream Crossings, Bridge:	number	25
Vegetation Management, 0-20 years old:	acres	0
Vegetation Management, 21-40 years old:	acres	0
Maintained Wildlife Fields (may overlap Bald Management Area):	acres	0
Existing Wilderness Study Area (WSA):	acres	0
Existing Inventoried Roadless Area (IRA may overlap WSA):	acres	1,972.4

Solitude or Primitive & Unconfined Recreation	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Current Backcountry Management Area (may overlap WSA & IRA):	acres	719.0
Inventoried Primitive Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) Setting:	acres	0

	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Solitude or Primitive & Unconfined Recreation		
Inventoried Semi-Primitive Non-Motorized ROS Setting:	acres	779.8
Inventoried Semi-Primitive Motorized ROS Setting (buffer of adjacent roads):	acres	0
Inventoried Roaded Natural ROS Setting (buffer of adjacent roads):	acres	1,552.3
National Forest System Trail, Hike-only Allowed Use:	miles	12.4
National Forest System Trail, Hike-Bike Allowed Use:	miles	0
National Forest System Trail, Hike-Horse Allowed Use:	miles	0.1
National Forest System Trail, Hike-Bike-Horse Allowed Use:	miles	3.0

	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Unique & Outstanding Features		
Current Special Interest Management Area (scenic, geologic, botanical, zoological):	acres	0
Current Designated Wild & Scenic River Corridor (1/4 mile each side):	acres	0
Current Eligible Wild & Scenic River Corridor (1/4 mile each side):	acres	1637.4
Research Natural Area:	acres	0

	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Size & Manageability		
Area, Total:	acres	2,338.5
Private/Non-Federal Inholdings, Total:	acres	0
Private/Non-Federal Inholdings, Count:	number	0
Outstanding or Reserved Subsurface Mineral Rights:	acres	2,332.1
Current Bald Management Area:	acres	1,537.5
Forest Research Plots, Count:	number	0



Name: Shining Rock Wilderness Extension – Sam Knob

Acres: 2,629 acres

Description of Area

Location & Access

The Sam Knob area is adjacent to the congressionally designated Shining Rock Wilderness. The area is in Haywood County, and lies between Shining Rock Wilderness at Wash Hollow to the north, the Blue Ridge Parkway to the south, NC215 to the west, and Black Balsam Road (NFSR 816) and Ivestor Gap Trail to the east. Access to the area is from Art Loeb and Black Balsam trailheads along NFSR 816, Flat Laurel Creek trailhead on NC215, and from the Blue Ridge Parkway.

Surroundings

Area boundaries are generally contiguous, with three narrow protrusions on the western boundary following curves of NC215. When considered with the potential Graveyard Ridge extension to the east, NFSR 816 forms a narrow excluded corridor from the Blue Ridge Parkway north to Black Balsam trailhead (with developed facilities) and developed parking area and continues to the Shining Rock Wilderness boundary along Ivestor Gap Trail; which is open seasonally to motorized vehicles. The northern boundary is adjacent to national forest system lands of the Shining Rock Wilderness, to the west is NC215 corridor, and to the south are federal lands of the Blue Ridge Parkway. There are no adjacent private lands.

Topography & Vegetation

The Sam Knob area is surrounded by high-elevation ridges to the north, east, and south and a narrow river gorge to the west. Sam Knob, which is centrally located in the area, is the most prominent topographic feature. Parts of the area have steep and rugged slopes, and rocky drops on Wash Hollow, Sam Branch, Spring Branch, and lower reaches of Flat Laurel Creek. Elevations range from 3,960 feet along the West Fork Pigeon River, to 6,040 feet at Sam Knob. The area has heath balds consisting of grassy “meadows” interspersed with mountain laurel, blueberry bushes, and patches of northern hardwood trees. There are two spruce-fir plantations that were planted in the Civilian Conservation Corps era as Confederate Forests. The area was once dominated by spruce-fir forest, but historic logging and severe wildfires created the mosaic of open and forested conditions present today. Ecozones within the area include high-elevation red oak, northern hardwoods, and spruce-fir; and there is bog habitat along the northeaster boundary near Ivestor Gap Trail.

Current Uses

The Sam Knob area contains a range of dispersed recreation opportunities, but its primary attractions are day hiking, backpacking, viewing scenery, berry picking, and fishing. There are developed and dispersed camp sites at Black Balsam along NC 215. Part of the area is currently managed for maintaining the open conditions of the balds. Approximately 2,548 acres are designated Inventoried Roadless Area. There are no NFS roads or timber management activities in the area, but there is a maintained wildlife field along Sam Knob Trail.

The area has several miles of hiking trail, which are accessed primarily from the Black Balsam trailhead including the Mountains to Sea, National Recreation Trail. The Sam Knob area is a destination for day hikers, waterfall viewers, and blueberry pickers, and thousands of visitors come to the area for viewing fall foliage. The Flat Laurel Creek Trail is open to horses and bicycles. Fishing is popular in Spring Branch, West Fork Pigeon River, and Flat Laurel Creek. Rock climbing opportunities can be found at the Victory

Wall near NC 215 and Wash Hollow. The open grassy meadows are popular with hunters. The area also has extensive use by special use permittees, often in large groups.

Evaluation of Wilderness Characteristics

Apparent Naturalness

The Sam Knob area was once covered with spruce-fir forests. After the timber was cut in the early twentieth century, there were devastating wildfires that burned logging debris and consumed the organic soil layer. Although these events altered the landscape, past restoration and planned efforts have improved the natural-appearing mosaic of heath balds and forests present today.

The area has no NFS roads within its boundaries, but part of Sam Knob Trail is surfaced with gravel and provides equipment access to a series of maintained wildlife fields. Past logging activities utilized locomotives and the railroad grades are still visible across the landscape; some of which are used as trails. One of these is Flat Laurel Creek Trail, which is open to horse, bike, and hiking uses. This old railroad grade was once converted to a road then later decommissioned; it has a large concrete bridge at its intersection with Spring Branch immediately inside the western boundary. Many segments of hiking trails in the area are eroded and deeply entrenched because of overuse, lack of maintenance, and unstable soils. Improvements to the most heavily used trails include constructed features, such as sawn-lumber boardwalks and stairs, and graveled trail surfaces. The area north of Sam Knob, in the Sam Branch and Wash Hollow drainages, have less evidence of human modification and a more natural appearance.

Opportunities for Solitude or Primitive & Unconfined Recreation

The Sam Knob area is surrounded on three sides by Black Balsam Road (NFSR 816) and trailhead, NC215, and the Blue Ridge Parkway. From the highest peaks, and those lands immediately adjacent to these roadways, the sights and sounds of vehicles are evident; but for most of the area, these intrusions are hidden by topography.

Sam Knob area receives high visitation, but opportunities for solitude still exist in many locations. The Mountains to Sea Trail, Sam Knob Trail, Flat Laurel Creek Trail, and the “meadows” near Black Balsam trailhead receive the most use, and are attractions to tens of thousands of day hikers and backpackers every year. School, church and camp groups frequent these areas as well, where encounters of 20-30 people at one time is not unusual during spring, summer, and fall. This heavy use is partly due to the easy access from Black Balsam trailhead. The exception to these impacts on solitude are in the Sam Branch and Wash Hollow drainages north of Sam Knob, where there are no NFS trails and less potential for visitor encounters.

The area has opportunities for primitive and unconfined recreation, although there are constructed features such as boardwalks and signage along some trails. Hikers frequent the area and there are backpacking, hunting, fishing, berry picking, and nature viewing opportunities. Most trails are hike-only, but Flat Laurel Creek Trail is open to horses and bicycles.

Other Values - Unique or Outstanding Qualities

Although the character of this landscape can be attributed to past human impacts, the area is popular as one of the most scenic places on the Pisgah NF.

Size & Manageability

The Sam Knob area is 2,629 acres, and if recommended, would be considered an extension to Shining Rock Wilderness. Area boundaries are generally contiguous. Northern boundaries are adjacent to the

Shining Rock Wilderness, eastern and western boundaries are adjacent to other National Forest System lands, and southern boundaries are adjacent to federal lands of the Blue Ridge Parkway. The area has high visitor use, and a trail designated for riding mountain bikes. Conversely, the Wash Hollow and Sam Branch drainages have less visitor use, and more opportunities for solitude than areas south of Sam Knob. The entire area has outstanding subsurface mineral rights.

Summary

Much of the Sam Knob area has evidence of human modification and use which affect naturalness, including maintained wildlife fields, highly developed trail structures, gravel trail surfacing, a mountain bike trail, and a concrete bridge. Opportunities for solitude are also impacted by high visitor use, and sights and sounds of civilization from nearby roadways. The exception is the area north of Sam Knob in the Wash Hollow and Sam Branch drainages, which offer opportunities for solitude, primitive recreation, and a higher degree of naturalness compared to the area closest to the Blue Ridge Parkway.

Quantitative Summary of Items/Activities within the Shining Rock Wilderness Extension – Sam Knob Area

Disclaimer: Information was generated from FS spatial datasets. All figures are approximate.

Description of Area	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Spruce-Fir Ecozone:	acres	1,513.5
Northern Hardwood Ecozone:	acres	587.8
High Elevation Red Oak Ecozone:	acres	124.4
Acidic Cove Ecozone:	acres	350.1
Rich Cove Ecozone:	acres	8.6
Mesic Oak Ecozone:	acres	8.9
Dry-Mesic Oak Ecozone:	acres	0
Dry Oak Ecozone:	acres	25.2
Pine-Oak/Heath Ecozone:	acres	0
Shortleaf Pine Ecozone:	acres	0
Alluvial Forest Ecozone:	acres	0

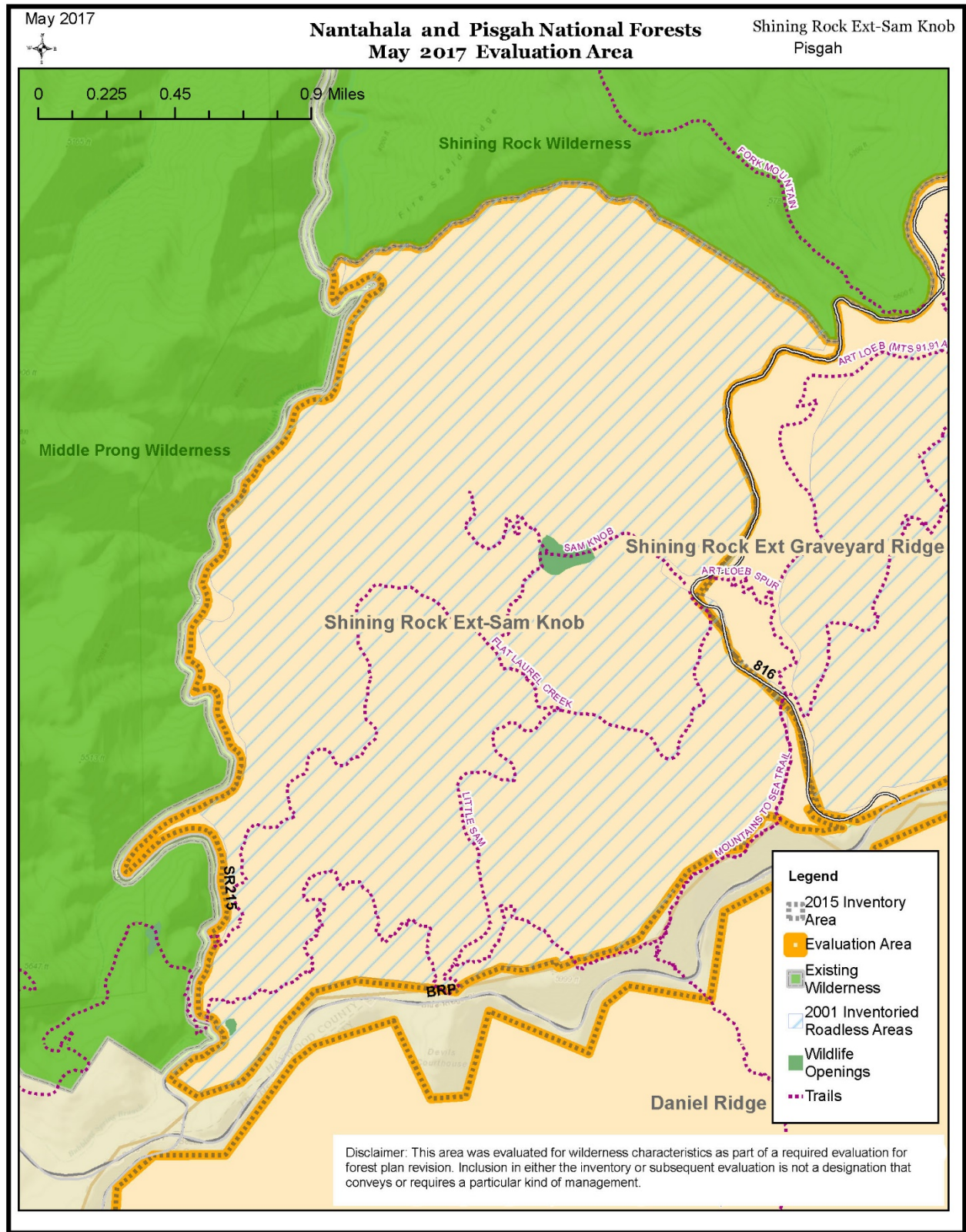
Apparent Naturalness	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Maintenance Level 1 National Forest System Roads:	miles	0
Closed Maintenance Level 2 National Forest System Roads:	miles	0
Road Stream Crossings, Bridge:	number	0
Road Stream Crossings, Other:	number	0
Trail Stream Crossings, Bridge:	number	2
Vegetation Management, 0-20 years old:	acres	0
Vegetation Management, 21-40 years old:	acres	0
Maintained Wildlife Fields (may overlap Bald Management Area):	acres	10.1
Existing Wilderness Study Area (WSA):	acres	0
Existing Inventoried Roadless Area (IRA may overlap WSA):	acres	2,551.9

Solitude or Primitive & Unconfined Recreation	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Current Backcountry Management Area (may overlap WSA & IRA):	acres	0
Inventoried Primitive Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) Setting:	acres	0

	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Solitude or Primitive & Unconfined Recreation		
Inventoried Semi-Primitive Non-Motorized ROS Setting:	acres	689.9
Inventoried Semi-Primitive Motorized ROS Setting (buffer of adjacent roads):	acres	0
Inventoried Roaded Natural ROS Setting (buffer of adjacent roads):	acres	1,939.1
National Forest System Trail, Hike-only Allowed Use:	miles	6.6
National Forest System Trail, Hike-Bike Allowed Use:	miles	0
National Forest System Trail, Hike-Horse Allowed Use:	miles	0
National Forest System Trail, Hike-Bike-Horse Allowed Use:	miles	3.7

	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Unique & Outstanding Features		
Current Special Interest Management Area (scenic, geologic, botanical, zoological):	acres	0
Current Designated Wild & Scenic River Corridor (1/4 mile each side):	acres	0
Current Eligible Wild & Scenic River Corridor (1/4 mile each side):	acres	0.1
Research Natural Area:	acres	0

	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Size & Manageability		
Area, Total:	acres	2,629.0
Private/Non-Federal Inholdings, Total:	acres	0
Private/Non-Federal Inholdings, Count:	number	0
Outstanding or Reserved Subsurface Mineral Rights:	acres	2,629.0
Current Bald Management Area:	acres	1,842.1
Forest Research Plots, Count:	number	0



Name: South Mills River

Acres: 17,105

Description of Area

Location & Access

The South Mills River area is located in Transylvania and Henderson Counties, and lies between Yellow Gap Road (NFSR1206) and the Cradle of Forestry in America to the north, and NC280 to the south; it is east of Avery Creek Road (NFSR477) and west of Queen Creek Mountain. Access to the area is from several trailheads along Yellow Gap Road, US276, Avery Creek Road, and NC280; with primary access points at Wolf Ford, Bradley Creek, Club Gap, Bennet Gap, Avery Creek, Black Mountain, and Turkey Pen Gap.

Surroundings

Area boundaries are generally contiguous, with several small protrusions to the north, east, and south. The northern boundary is adjacent to National Forest System lands, including the congressionally designated Cradle of Forestry in America, while most of the southern and eastern boundaries are adjacent to private lands in the Mills River and Boylston communities. In parts of the area to the south and east, NC280 and private residential and commercial development are visible, but Forge Mountain and Queen Creek Mountain block those views from the core area.

Topography & Vegetation

Parts of this area have steep and rugged terrain, with elevations ranging from 2,200 feet along the South Mills River to 4,286 feet at Black Mountain. Another prominent peak is Funnel Top Mountain at 4,266 feet. Eastern and southern ridges shield most of the core area from views of private development, and Rich Mountain/Soapstone Ridge to the northwest shelter the area from the Cradle of Forestry in America and US276. A broad range of ecozones are represented across the area, including acidic cove, rich cove, dry-mesic oak, dry-oak, and northern red oak.

Current Uses

The area contains a wide range of dispersed recreation opportunities and forest management activities. Fishing is very popular in the South Mills River and its tributaries, which are considered outstanding resource waters and draw many trout fishermen to the area. Hunting is also popular and the area has several low maintenance level roads, maintained wildlife openings, and recent vegetation treatments.

There are many trails for hiking, mountain biking, and horseback riding. This area (and Laurel Mountain area) has a concentration of horse trails with nearby equestrian campgrounds and trailheads. The area is also very popular with mountain bikers. Trail riding opportunities on the Pisgah Ranger District are considered a recreation and ecotourism destination by many in the cycling and equestrian communities, and trails within the area are highly valued by those user groups, particularly those seeking a remote backcountry experience. The area also has extensive use by special use permittees, often in large groups.

Henderson County has a special use permit to maintain water lines in a portion of this area near Turkey Pen. A portion of the area, approximately 6,975 acres, is currently managed for a backcountry recreation experience; and 8,627 acres are in the South Mills River Inventoried Roadless Area which overlaps the backcountry management area.

Evaluation of Wilderness Characteristics

Apparent Naturalness

Most of the South Mills River area has been logged in the past and there are many old logging roads in the area; however, the Inventoried Roadless Area offers thousands of acres which are predominately natural appearing. To the west and north, outside the Inventoried Roadless Area, are recent vegetation and wildlife habitat management activities that represent a departure from naturalness. Throughout the area, heavily used mountain bike and equestrian trails impact the appearance of naturalness. Constructed features include developed trails, trail bridges, low maintenance-level roads, and road culverts

Opportunities for Solitude or Primitive & Unconfined Recreation

While opportunities for solitude exist across some of the area, there are many miles of heavily used trails where encounters with other forest visitors are a high probability throughout the year. The nearby Turkey Pen Gap, Wolf Ford, and Black Mountain trailheads serve as a popular access points for mountain bikers, hikers, horseback riders, hunters and fishermen, as do other trailheads around the area's perimeter. Sights and sounds of civilization are evident from a locations along private lands in the south and east, from the highest peaks, and from adjacent roads and developed recreation areas; however, much of the area is sheltered by surrounding ridges.

There are many opportunities for primitive and unconfined recreation in the area. Hikers frequent the area, and there are hunting and outstanding fishing opportunities. The South Mills River area is known for its equestrian and mountain bike trails; the latter of which is not considered a primitive type of recreation.

Other Values - Unique or Outstanding Qualities

Scenic features of this area are common within the context of the Southern Appalachian Mountains, and not particularly unique. The area contains several miles of the South Mills River, an eligible Wild and Scenic River.

Size & Manageability

At 17,105 acres, the South Mills River area is of sufficient size to be managed in an unimpaired condition; with 8,627 acres of the core area in an Inventoried Roadless Area. Area boundaries are relatively consolidated, with several small protrusions. All other boundaries are adjacent to National Forest System lands.

Summary

The South Mills River area is large enough and configured in such a way that it has some wilderness characteristics; however, there are negative impacts to naturalness and solitude across much of the area. Evidence of past and current human modification and the well-developed trails impact apparent naturalness. The high visitor use in the area impacts solitude. Infrastructure and potential sights or sounds of civilization detract from naturalness and opportunities for solitude across much of the area.

Quantitative Summary of Items/Activities within the South Mills River Area

Disclaimer: Information was generated from FS spatial datasets. All figures are approximate.

Description of Area	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Spruce-Fir Ecozone:	acres	3.0
Northern Hardwood Ecozone:	acres	96.6
High Elevation Red Oak Ecozone:	acres	97.6
Acidic Cove Ecozone:	acres	6,316.0
Rich Cove Ecozone:	acres	3,538.8
Mesic Oak Ecozone:	acres	1,382.7
Dry-Mesic Oak Ecozone:	acres	2,087.0
Dry Oak Ecozone:	acres	289.4
Pine-Oak/Heath Ecozone:	acres	2,535.3
Shortleaf Pine Ecozone:	acres	740.0
Alluvial Forest Ecozone:	acres	20.0

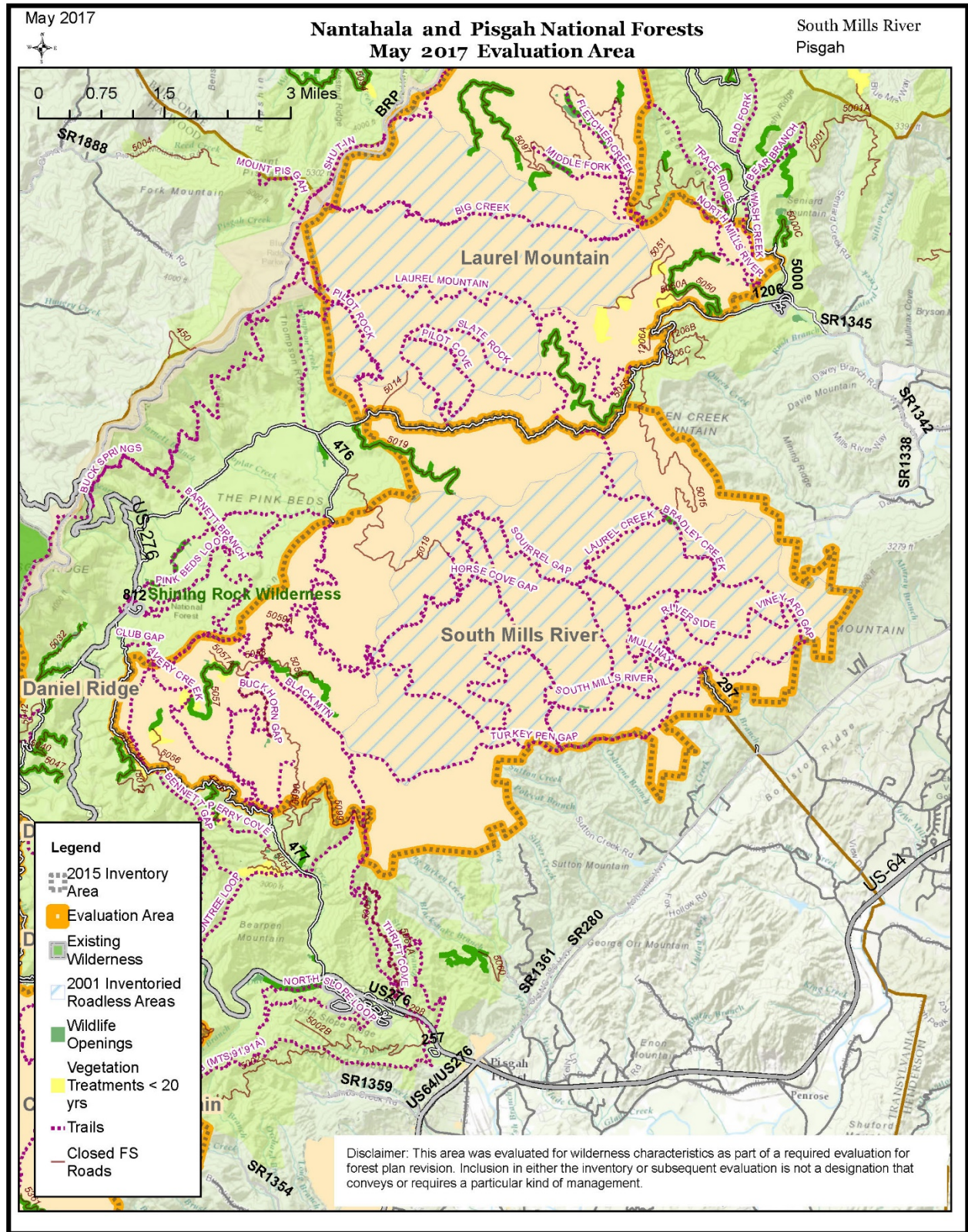
Apparent Naturalness	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Maintenance Level 1 National Forest System Roads:	miles	1.7
Closed Maintenance Level 2 National Forest System Roads:	miles	13.2
Road Stream Crossings, Bridge:	number	0
Road Stream Crossings, Other:	number	10
Trail Stream Crossings, Bridge:	number	25
Vegetation Management, 0-20 years old:	acres	76.1
Vegetation Management, 21-40 years old:	acres	640.9
Maintained Wildlife Fields (may overlap Bald Management Area):	acres	20.0
Existing Wilderness Study Area (WSA):	acres	0
Existing Inventoried Roadless Area (IRA may overlap WSA):	acres	8,623.4

Solitude or Primitive & Unconfined Recreation	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Current Backcountry Management Area (may overlap WSA & IRA):	acres	6,966.2
Inventoried Primitive Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) Setting:	acres	0
Inventoried Semi-Primitive Non-Motorized ROS Setting:	acres	8,727.1

	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Solitude or Primitive & Unconfined Recreation		
Inventoried Semi-Primitive Motorized ROS Setting (buffer of adjacent roads):	acres	5,129.0
Inventoried Roded Natural ROS Setting (buffer of adjacent roads):	acres	3,245.3
National Forest System Trail, Hike-only Allowed Use:	miles	3.1
National Forest System Trail, Hike-Bike Allowed Use:	miles	12.5
National Forest System Trail, Hike-Horse Allowed Use:	miles	5.0
National Forest System Trail, Hike-Bike-Horse Allowed Use:	miles	42.3

	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Unique & Outstanding Features		
Current Special Interest Management Area (scenic, geologic, botanical, zoological):	acres	120.0
Current Designated Wild & Scenic River Corridor (1/4 mile each side):	acres	0
Current Eligible Wild & Scenic River Corridor (1/4 mile each side):	acres	4,028.3
Research Natural Area:	acres	0

	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Size & Manageability		
Area, Total:	acres	17,105.4
Private/Non-Federal Inholdings, Total:	acres	0
Private/Non-Federal Inholdings, Count:	number	0
Outstanding or Reserved Subsurface Mineral Rights:	acres	0
Current Bald Management Area:	acres	0
Forest Research Plots, Count:	number	14



Tusquitee Ranger District

Name: Ash Cove

Acres: 5,885 acres

Description of Area

Location & Access

The Ash Cove area is located in Cherokee County, NC, on the Tusquitee Ranger District of the Nantahala National Forest. It lies to the northeast of US19 and the town of Andrews and the Snowbird Mountains ridge; and is east of Tatham Gap Road (NFSR423).

Surroundings

The northern and eastern boundaries are adjacent to National Forest System (NFS) lands. The southern boundary is adjacent to private lands and nearby US19. The town of Andrews lies across US19 and a municipal airport is to the west.

Topography & Vegetation

The Ash Cove area is characterized by the Snowbird Mountains ridgeline that defines the northern boundary of the area and is also the Cherokee and Graham County borders. Elevation drops substantially from the ridgeline down to the Valley River valley and range from approximately 4,700 feet on Teyahalee Bald down to approximately 1,900 feet along Gipp Creek to the southwest. Generally, the area has a southwestern aspect, toward the nearby town of Andrews.

Ecozones include high elevation red oak, acidic cove, rich cove, mesic oak, dry-mesic oak, dry oak, and pine-oak/heath. Portions of the area have old growth characteristics.

Current Uses

The Ash Cove area is currently managed for scenery, dispersed recreation, wildlife, and timber. A portion of the Bartram Trail extension runs along the Snowbird Mountains ridge to the north. There are several timber harvest units aging 21-40 years old, and a linear wildlife opening along the closed NFS Road 2616. Hunting is popular in the area, as is forest products gathering. There is also a portion of a major communication site in the northwestern corner of the area.

Evaluation of Wilderness Characteristics

Apparent Naturalness

Most of the area has natural appearing forests that have recovered from past logging activities and portions of the area have old growth characteristics. Impacts to naturalness include a maintained linear wildlife field that runs the entire length of NFSR2616, and a portion of Teyahalee (Joanna) Bald communication site also lies within area boundaries.

Opportunities for Solitude or Primitive & Unconfined Recreation

Some opportunities for solitude exist in sheltered coves of the area, though sights and sounds of civilization are very evident in the Valley River below. About 0.3 miles south of the area is US19, with the town of Andrews just beyond. A variety of commercial, agricultural, and residential development is visible in the valley, as is an active railroad and the Andrews-Murphy Airfield. The previously mentioned

communication site is also visible along the ridge to the northwest. These developments are primarily seen and heard from ridges and southwestern slopes within the area and adversely affect solitude.

The area offers many opportunities for primitive recreation, such as hunting, fishing, hiking, and backpacking. The Bartram National Recreation Trail extension traverses the Snowbird Mountains ridge along the northern boundary and is designated as a hike-only trail. There are no trails in the area designated for mountain bikes. Much of the area offers opportunities for unconfined recreation, though some of the narrow arms of the area adjacent to non-federal lands would restrict movement within the area.

Other Values - Unique or Outstanding Qualities

Although the high ridge of the Snowbird Mountains forms a scenic backdrop for the town of Andrews, the mountains are typical for the area and not particularly unique or outstanding. The area also offers diverse ecosystems, clean water, and old growth characteristics, but these are also well represented on NFS lands outside area boundaries. There are two State Natural Heritage Areas located here.

Size & Manageability

The southern boundary of the area is irregular and follows a combination of topographic features, roads, and NFS ownership boundaries; a narrow protrusion extends to the southwest. Most of the southern boundary is adjacent to non-federal lands. Approximately 3,864 acres have outstanding or reserved subsurface mineral rights. All of these factors combine to make management to preserve wilderness characteristics difficult.

Summary

The Ash Cove area has impacts to naturalness from a communication site within the area and managed linear wildlife openings. There are impacts to solitude from sights and sounds of development visible in the valley, including the town of Andrews, an active railroad, and the Andrews Airport. The southern boundary is irregular, reducing manageability as well as confining recreational opportunities.

Quantitative Summary of Items/Activities within the Ash Cove Area

Disclaimer: Information was generated from FS spatial datasets. All figures are approximate.

Description of Area	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Spruce-Fir Ecozone:	acres	0.7
Northern Hardwood Ecozone:	acres	75.3
High Elevation Red Oak Ecozone:	acres	367.8
Acidic Cove Ecozone:	acres	191.3
Rich Cove Ecozone:	acres	2,659.4
Mesic Oak Ecozone:	acres	658.0
Dry-Mesic Oak Ecozone:	acres	1,115.0
Dry Oak Ecozone:	acres	218.2
Pine-Oak/Heath Ecozone:	acres	578.6
Shortleaf Pine Ecozone:	acres	14.2
Alluvial Forest Ecozone:	acres	0.4

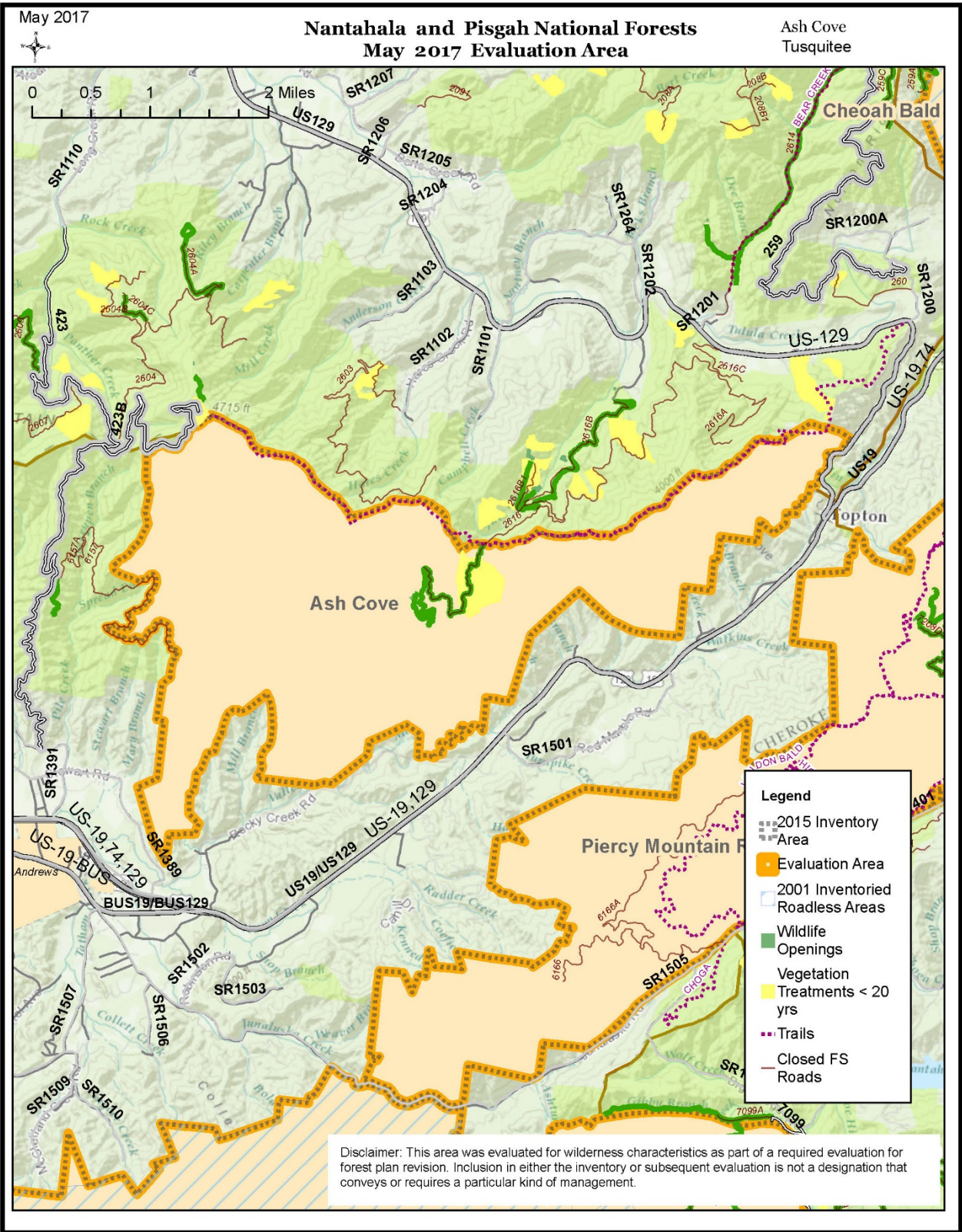
Apparent Naturalness	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Maintenance Level 1 National Forest System Roads:	miles	0
Closed Maintenance Level 2 National Forest System Roads:	miles	1.5
Road Stream Crossings, Bridge:	number	0
Road Stream Crossings, Other:	number	2
Trail Stream Crossings, Bridge:	number	0
Vegetation Management, 0-20 years old:	acres	0.02
Vegetation Management, 21-40 years old:	acres	286.1
Maintained Wildlife Fields (may overlap Bald Management Area):	acres	5.9
Existing Wilderness Study Area (WSA):	acres	0
Existing Inventoried Roadless Area (IRA may overlap WSA):	acres	0

Solitude or Primitive & Unconfined Recreation	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Current Backcountry Management Area (may overlap WSA & IRA):	acres	0
Inventoried Primitive Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) Setting:	acres	0
Inventoried Semi-Primitive Non-Motorized ROS Setting:	acres	2,224.4

	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Solitude or Primitive & Unconfined Recreation		
Inventoried Semi-Primitive Motorized ROS Setting (buffer of adjacent roads):	acres	2,110.1
Inventoried Roded Natural ROS Setting (buffer of adjacent roads):	acres	1,549.6
National Forest System Trail, Hike-only Allowed Use:	miles	4.5
National Forest System Trail, Hike-Bike Allowed Use:	miles	0
National Forest System Trail, Hike-Horse Allowed Use:	miles	0
National Forest System Trail, Hike-Bike-Horse Allowed Use:	miles	0

	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Unique & Outstanding Features		
Current Special Interest Management Area (scenic, geologic, botanical, zoological):	acres	0
Current Designated Wild & Scenic River Corridor (1/4 mile each side):	acres	0
Current Eligible Wild & Scenic River Corridor (1/4 mile each side):	acres	0
Research Natural Area:	acres	0

	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Size & Manageability		
Area, Total:	acres	5,884.9
Private/Non-Federal Inholdings, Total:	acres	0
Private/Non-Federal Inholdings, Count:	number	0
Outstanding or Reserved Subsurface Mineral Rights:	acres	3,864.0
Current Bald Management Area:	acres	0
Forest Research Plots, Count:	number	0



Name: Boteler Peak

Acres: 10,524 acres

Description of Area

Location & Access

The Boteler Peak area is in Clay County about 10 miles east of Hayesville, NC, on the Tusquitee Ranger District of the Nantahala National Forest. It is located between Tusquitee Road (SR1307) to the north, and US 64 to the south. Access to the east side of area is from the Chunky Gal Trail (NFST 77) with a trailhead off of US 64. The west side of the area can be accessed from Nelson Ridge Road (NFSR 351) which forms part of the northwestern border.

Surroundings

Most of the southern, western, and northwestern boundaries of the Boteler Peak area are adjacent to private lands, while those to the east are bordered by NFS lands. The area is bordered by open roads to northwest and east. All adjacent NFS lands, as well as private lands to the northwest, are generally forested; however, private lands to the west and south are developed with residential, commercial, and agricultural uses. To the south is the community of Shooting Creek, which is along US64 and has a concentration of development. Chatuge Lake is to the southwest about a mile from area boundaries.

Topography & Vegetation

Most of the area has steep terrain that drops off from high elevation ridges down to the valleys below. Elevations range from approximately 5,010 feet at Boteler Peak down to approximately 2,000 feet where Pounding Mill Creek flows out of the area toward Shooting Creek on the southwest side.

The defining feature of the area is the main ridge running east to west through the area, which is formed by Boteler Peak, The Pinnacle, Birch Knob, and Piney Top. Another high ridge is along Vineyard Mountain, running from The Pinnacle south toward Shooting Creek. These steep south facing slopes contain additional minor ridges and valleys and feeder streams to Shooting Creek which flows to Chatuge Lake (Hiwassee River Basin). The steep north facing slopes of the Boteler Peak ridge circle around Perry Gap to envelop a portion of the Tusquitee Creek watershed. The eastern slopes are somewhat gentler and drain to Buck Creek, a tributary to the Nantahala River to the north (Little Tennessee River Basin).

A range of ecozones are represented in the area, including rich cove, mesic oak, acidic cove, pine-oak/heath, dry oak, and high elevation red oak. Some of these ecozones contain rare plant species and have old growth characteristics.

Current Uses

The Boteler Peak area is managed for backcountry recreation, scenery, wildlife, timber, botanical special interest, and rock hounding. The area has been logged in the recent past with 155 acres harvested within the last 20 years and 986 acres that were cut 21-40 years ago. Vegetation and wildlife management activities are located primarily in the northern sections of the area. Much of the area is popular for hunting, fishing, hiking, backpacking, scenery, nature viewing, and gathering forest products. Approximately 59 acres is managed as a Special Interest Area for its botanical and geological values and is one of the few rock hounding areas on the Nantahala and Pisgah National Forests. The Chunky Gal Trail traverses the area's eastern boundary, from the northwest near Tusquitee Bald to the Appalachian Trail to the southeast at White Oak Stamp.

Evaluation of Wilderness Characteristics

Apparent Naturalness

Approximately 40% (4,195 acres) of the proposed area includes the designated Boteler Peak Inventoried Roadless Area, which overlaps most of the 3,216 acres managed for backcountry recreation. This core area has natural appearing forests with little evidence of man. However, areas to the north and east have recent timber harvests, maintained wildlife fields, low maintenance level roads, and the Corundum Knob/Buck Creek rock hounding area. There are approximately four miles of closed maintenance level 1 and 2 NFS roads in the area, some of which are maintained as a linear wildlife opening or access to mowed wildlife fields affecting naturalness. Along the eastern boundary on Bruce Ridge Road (NFSR 6237), there is a communication tower and a cleared utility corridor. All of these features show evidence of human modification and adversely affect naturalness.

Opportunities for Solitude or Primitive & Unconfined Recreation

There are opportunities for solitude in the area, especially in the interior of the Inventoried Roadless Area. However, concentrated development on private lands to the west, and in the Shooting Creek community to the south have sights and sounds of civilization which adversely affect solitude from many of the high ridges and south and west facing slopes. These developments include a high density housing development, a golf course, small farms, and a manufacturing plant visible to the south and southwest.

The area has opportunities for primitive recreation. Chunky Gal Trail, along the eastern boundary, is designated for hiking. Additionally, hunting, fishing, and rock hounding are popular activities in the area; however, some of the narrow arms of the boundary configuration to the north and south would confine recreation users to narrow strips (less than a quarter of a mile wide in some sections) of National Forest land.

Other Values - Unique or Outstanding Qualities

The area contains forests with old growth characteristics, provides clean water, has a diversity of wildlife, and rare plants are present. The area also contains rock outcrops providing rare habitats of serpentine woodland, and the whole area serves as a scenic backdrop for Shooting Creek, Chatuge Lake, and the US64 corridor. However, with exception of the serpentine barren/woodland, these attributes are not necessarily outstanding within the context of the Southern Appalachian Mountains. There are two State Natural Heritage Areas located in the Boteler Peak area.

Size & Manageability

Although much of the area (especially the core Inventoried Roadless Area) is managed to provide primitive recreation, sights and sounds of civilization from outside the area affect solitude. The Boteler Peak area's irregular shape with several narrow protrusions would confine recreation users and make management to preserve wilderness characteristics difficult. In addition to the various protrusions, Barnett Creek Road (NFSR 6236), an open road, is cherry-stemmed into the area along the east side, allowing vehicles access to the rock hounding area at Corundum Knob. Sights and sounds of civilization are evident along the boundaries, especially to the south, west, and northwest. There are 1,057 acres of outstanding or reserved subsurface mineral rights.

Summary

The Boteler Peak area has natural appearing forests, and opportunities for solitude and primitive and unconfined recreation in the interior of the area; however, naturalness is adversely affected in areas of recent timber management, closed roads and wildlife habitat improvements. Solitude is affected by

sights and sounds of civilization where evident from ridgetops and many southern and western facing slopes. The irregular boundary configuration limits opportunities for unconfined recreation in those narrow arms of NFS lands. While the core Inventoried Roadless Area contains stronger characteristics than the Boteler Peak area as a whole, the Inventoried Roadless Area alone may not be of a sufficient size and configuration to make its preservation and use in an unimpaired condition practicable.

Quantitative Summary of Items/Activities within the Boteler Peak Area

Disclaimer: Information was generated from FS spatial datasets. All figures are approximate.

Description of Area	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Spruce-Fir Ecozone:	acres	29.8
Northern Hardwood Ecozone:	acres	177.5
High Elevation Red Oak Ecozone:	acres	540.6
Acidic Cove Ecozone:	acres	1,093.1
Rich Cove Ecozone:	acres	3,934.0
Mesic Oak Ecozone:	acres	3,144.6
Dry-Mesic Oak Ecozone:	acres	67.2
Dry Oak Ecozone:	acres	553.5
Pine-Oak/Heath Ecozone:	acres	948.4
Shortleaf Pine Ecozone:	acres	27.7
Alluvial Forest Ecozone:	acres	0

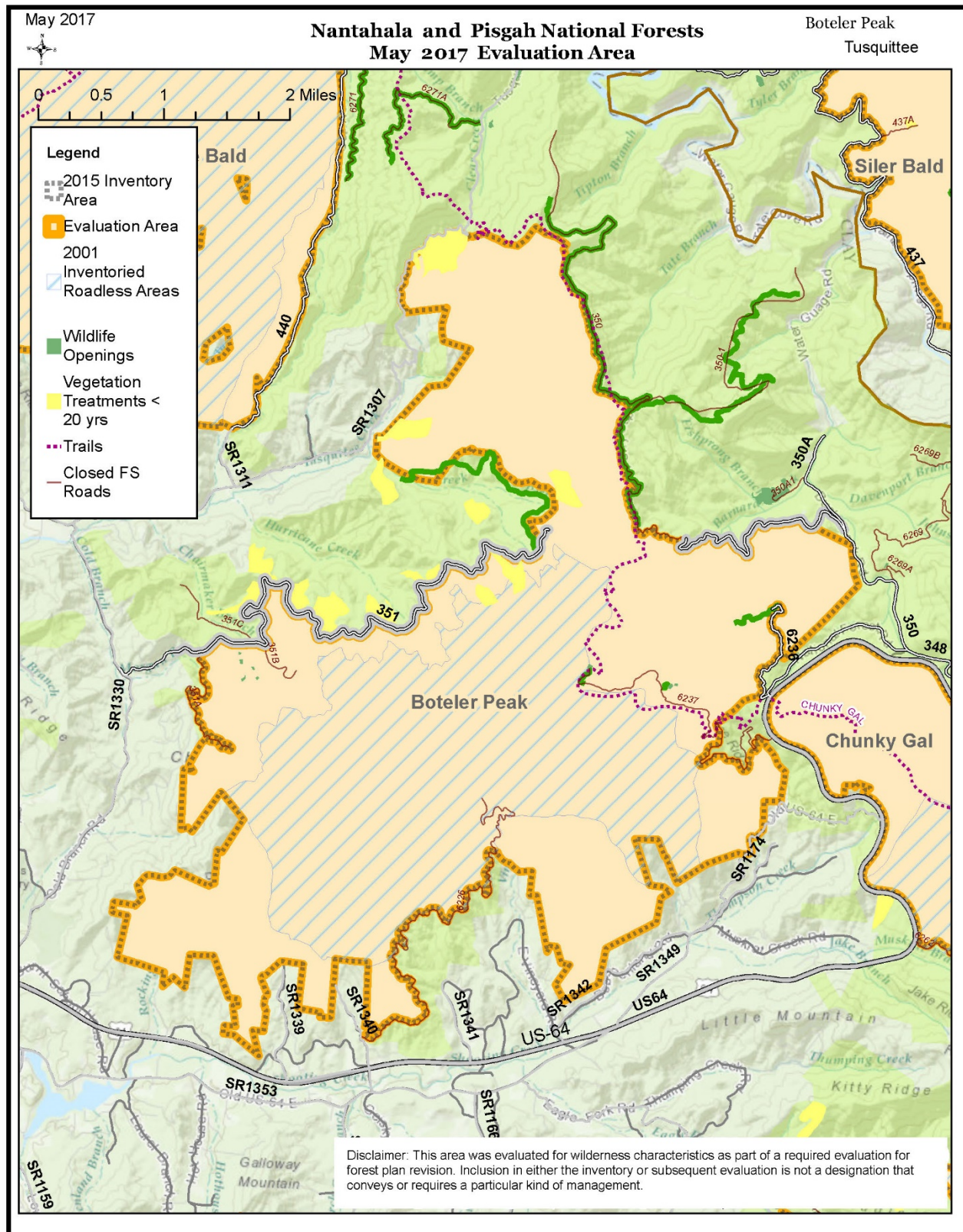
Apparent Naturalness	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Maintenance Level 1 National Forest System Roads:	miles	0.9
Closed Maintenance Level 2 National Forest System Roads:	miles	3.2
Road Stream Crossings, Bridge:	number	0
Road Stream Crossings, Other:	number	3
Trail Stream Crossings, Bridge:	number	0
Vegetation Management, 0-20 years old:	acres	155.1
Vegetation Management, 21-40 years old:	acres	985.6
Maintained Wildlife Fields (may overlap Bald Management Area):	acres	3.5
Existing Wilderness Study Area (WSA):	acres	0
Existing Inventoried Roadless Area (IRA may overlap WSA):	acres	4,195.2

Solitude or Primitive & Unconfined Recreation	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Current Backcountry Management Area (may overlap WSA & IRA):	acres	3,215.9
Inventoried Primitive Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) Setting:	acres	0
Inventoried Semi-Primitive Non-Motorized ROS Setting:	acres	2,609.4

	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Solitude or Primitive & Unconfined Recreation		
Inventoried Semi-Primitive Motorized ROS Setting (buffer of adjacent roads):	acres	3,682.7
Inventoried Roded Natural ROS Setting (buffer of adjacent roads):	acres	4,231.5
National Forest System Trail, Hike-only Allowed Use:	miles	5.4
National Forest System Trail, Hike-Bike Allowed Use:	miles	0
National Forest System Trail, Hike-Horse Allowed Use:	miles	0
National Forest System Trail, Hike-Bike-Horse Allowed Use:	miles	0

	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Unique & Outstanding Features		
Current Special Interest Management Area (scenic, geologic, botanical, zoological):	acres	59.3
Current Designated Wild & Scenic River Corridor (1/4 mile each side):	acres	0
Current Eligible Wild & Scenic River Corridor (1/4 mile each side):	acres	0
Research Natural Area:	acres	0

	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Size & Manageability		
Area, Total:	acres	10,523.7
Private/Non-Federal Inholdings, Total:	acres	0
Private/Non-Federal Inholdings, Count:	number	0
Outstanding or Reserved Subsurface Mineral Rights:	acres	1,057.4
Current Bald Management Area:	acres	0
Forest Research Plots, Count:	number	0



Name: Cantrell Top

Acres: 3,664 acres

Description of Area

Location & Access

The Cantrell Top area is along the North Carolina and Tennessee State line northwest of Murphy NC, in Cherokee County on the Tusquitee Ranger District of the Nantahala National Forest. National Forest System (NFS) Road 50 runs along the eastern boundary of the area, Joe Brown Highway forms the southern boundary, and the Benton MacKaye Trail follows the ridgeline on the northwestern boundary. Access to the area is from these roads and trail and from the Cherokee NF Upper Bald River area.

Surroundings

The area is surrounded almost entirely by National Forest ownership except for a private tract to the northwest at Tate Gap. On the northeastern boundary, the area abuts the Upper Bald River Wilderness Study Area on the Cherokee NF, which has been recommended for wilderness designation. Two open roads are adjacent to the eastern boundary; Joe Brown Highway (SR 1325) is adjacent to the southern boundary and NFS Road 50. NFS 50 separates the area from the Unicoi Mountains area to the east.

Topography & Vegetation

The border of this area along the NC and TN state line is defined by a high ridge with steep slopes. The highest elevation is approximately 3,600 feet at Cantrell Top, and the lowest is about 1,560 feet at Pretty Pine Branch; an elevation change of 2,040 feet. Vegetation in the area consists of mostly mesic oak and shortleaf pine ecozones, with some acidic cove, dry oak, dry-mesic oak, and pine-oak/heath. There are white pine stands in the area.

Current Uses

The area is currently managed for wildlife, timber, dispersed recreation, and scenery. Although there have been no timber harvest activities in the area in the last 20 years, there are 4.7 acres of maintained wildlife fields. The Benton MacKaye Trail traverses the entire ridge along the area's western and northern boundary, and the area is popular with hikers, backpackers, and hunters.

Evaluation of Wilderness Characteristics

Apparent Naturalness

The majority of this area has a natural appearance. The area has approximately 385 acres of past timber harvest ranging from 21-40 years old and there is evidence of associated skid roads; although these harvests have revegetated and are largely unnoticeable to the average visitor. Just over four miles of closed maintenance level 1 and 2 roads access maintained wildlife fields on the eastern edge of the area but impacts from these roads are confined to their immediate vicinity. The Benton MacKaye Trail is a minimally developed hiking trail along the ridgetop and does not detract from the area's naturalness.

Opportunities for Solitude or Primitive & Unconfined Recreation

The area offers many opportunities for solitude, especially in its core and along the ridge shared with the Cherokee NF's Upper Bald River Wilderness Study Area. Impacts to solitude would be experienced immediately adjacent to state and NFS roads along the area's eastern and southern perimeter, but sights and sounds of vehicles are not pervasive across the entire area. There are opportunities for primitive

recreation in the area including hunting, backcountry angling, and nature viewing. The Benton MacKaye Trail provides a remote long-distance trail experience through the area.

A portion of the area to the north, adjacent to Upper Bald River Wilderness Study Area, offers unconfined recreation where visitors could traverse thousands of acres of natural-appearing forest without crossing open roads or leaving NFS lands; however, the narrowness of the area's southwestern arm has a lower degree of wilderness characteristics because it would confine visitors seeking a wilderness experience to a corridor that, in places, is only one-half mile wide.

Other Values - Unique or Outstanding Qualities

The high ridge that runs along the North Carolina and Tennessee border provides a scenic backdrop to the Hiwassee River Valley below. The Trail of Tears National Historic Trail borders the area to the south along Joe Brown Highway.

Size & Manageability

At less than 5,000 acres, this area would typically be too small to manage as a stand-alone wilderness; however, the adjacency to the Upper Bald River Wilderness Study Area in Tennessee would make this an extension to an existing designation for recommended wilderness. The area's boundary configuration to the southwest could present an issue in managing for unconfined recreation and possibly solitude; however, the area to the northeast from Peels Gap to Sandy Gap and adjacent to the Upper Bald River Wilderness Study Area has greater opportunities for unconfined recreation and solitude.

Summary

The Cantrell Top area is predominately natural appearing although there is some evidence of past management and closed roads. The area has opportunities for solitude, especially in its core and along the ridge shared with the Cherokee NF. The area's boundary configuration to the southwest is not conducive to managing for unconfined recreation and solitude; however, the area to the northeast from Peels Gap to Sandy Gap and adjacent to the Cherokee NF's Upper Bald River Wilderness Study Area, has a higher degree of wilderness characteristics.

Quantitative Summary of Items/Activities within the Cantrell Top Area

Disclaimer: Information was generated from FS spatial datasets. All figures are approximate.

Description of Area	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Spruce-Fir Ecozone:	acres	0
Northern Hardwood Ecozone:	acres	1.2
High Elevation Red Oak Ecozone:	acres	3.0
Acidic Cove Ecozone:	acres	492.8
Rich Cove Ecozone:	acres	11.0
Mesic Oak Ecozone:	acres	1,340.8
Dry-Mesic Oak Ecozone:	acres	370.7
Dry Oak Ecozone:	acres	102.0
Pine-Oak/Heath Ecozone:	acres	71.3
Shortleaf Pine Ecozone:	acres	1,263.9
Alluvial Forest Ecozone:	acres	8.1

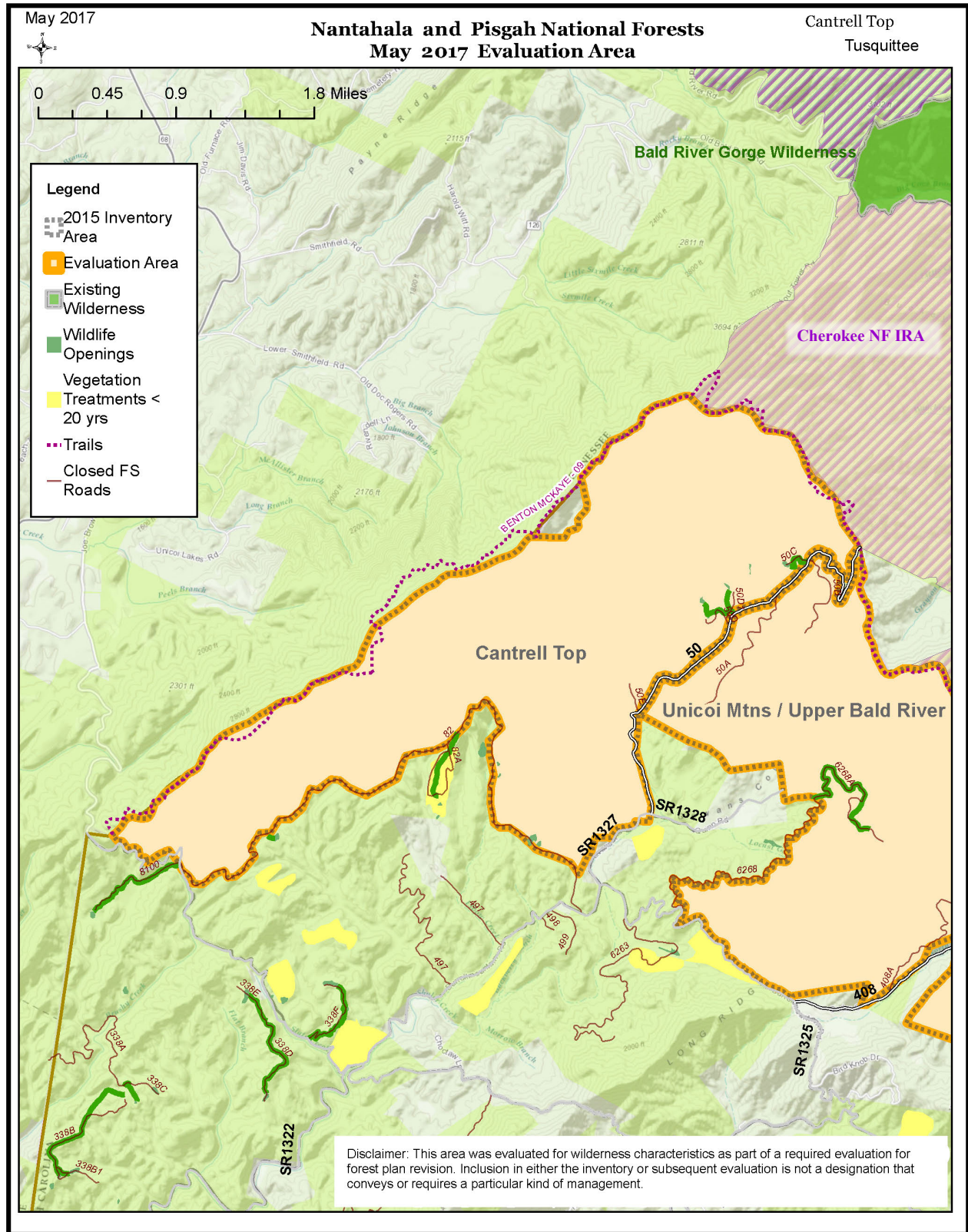
Apparent Naturalness	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Maintenance Level 1 National Forest System Roads:	miles	0.9
Closed Maintenance Level 2 National Forest System Roads:	miles	3.3
Road Stream Crossings, Bridge:	number	0
Road Stream Crossings, Other:	number	7
Trail Stream Crossings, Bridge:	number	0
Vegetation Management, 0-20 years old:	acres	0
Vegetation Management, 21-40 years old:	acres	384.5
Maintained Wildlife Fields (may overlap Bald Management Area):	acres	4.7
Existing Wilderness Study Area (WSA):	acres	0
Existing Inventoried Roadless Area (IRA may overlap WSA):	acres	0

Solitude or Primitive & Unconfined Recreation	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Current Backcountry Management Area (may overlap WSA & IRA):	acres	0
Inventoried Primitive Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) Setting:	acres	0
Inventoried Semi-Primitive Non-Motorized ROS Setting:	acres	1,011.3

	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Solitude or Primitive & Unconfined Recreation		
Inventoried Semi-Primitive Motorized ROS Setting (buffer of adjacent roads):	acres	1,095.4
Inventoried Roded Natural ROS Setting (buffer of adjacent roads):	acres	1,556.9
National Forest System Trail, Hike-only Allowed Use:	miles	3.0
National Forest System Trail, Hike-Bike Allowed Use:	miles	0
National Forest System Trail, Hike-Horse Allowed Use:	miles	0
National Forest System Trail, Hike-Bike-Horse Allowed Use:	miles	0

	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Unique & Outstanding Features		
Current Special Interest Management Area (scenic, geologic, botanical, zoological):	acres	0
Current Designated Wild & Scenic River Corridor (1/4 mile each side):	acres	0
Current Eligible Wild & Scenic River Corridor (1/4 mile each side):	acres	0
Research Natural Area:	acres	0

	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Size & Manageability		
Area, Total:	acres	3664.1
Private/Non-Federal Inholdings, Total:	acres	0
Private/Non-Federal Inholdings, Count:	number	0
Outstanding or Reserved Subsurface Mineral Rights:	acres	0
Current Bald Management Area:	acres	0
Forest Research Plots, Count:	number	0



Name: Cherry Cove

Acres: 1,159 acres

Description of Area

Location & Access

The Cherry Cove area is adjacent to the Southern Nantahala Wilderness. The area is located in Clay County, NC, and lies along the North Carolina and Georgia State line on the Tusquitee Ranger District of the Nantahala National Forest. The area is between NC1159 to the west, Galloway Mountain to the north, and Davenport Branch to the east. Chunky Gal inventory area, another potential extension to Southern Nantahala Wilderness, lies to the east.

Surroundings

With the exception of the southern border, the boundaries of Cherry Cove are all adjacent to private land. Shooting Creek Township is north of the area and Chatuge Lake is located to the west. The private lands on three side of the area contain several housing developments and agricultural lands; some of which are immediately adjacent to area boundaries.

Topography & Vegetation

The Cherry Cove area is defined by three ridges that run north through the core of the area: Big Spring Ridge, Pigpen Ridge, and the ridge formed by Watkins Knob. Elevations range from approximately 3,284 feet on Big Spring Ridge down to approximately 2,075 feet near Cherry Cove Branch. Topography allows views to the north, east, and west towards adjacent private lands. Ecozones within the area include acidic cove, rich cove, and mesic oak.

Current Uses

The Cherry Cove area contains no established trails or roads. Approximately 821 acres are identified as the Cherry Cove Inventoried Roadless Area.

Evaluation of Wilderness Characteristics

Apparent Naturalness

The majority of this area is identified as an Inventoried Roadless Area and has been managed to maintain a roadless character. The area has no NFS roads within its boundaries; however, to the west near Flea Mountain, there is a primitive road from private lands to the ridgetop which does adversely affect naturalness in this narrow sliver of NFS land. Overall, the Cherry Cove area has had no timber or wildlife management activities in the recent past, and is natural appearing to the average forest visitor. The area has a significant infestation of Japanese Spiraea, which detracts from its natural condition.

Opportunities for Solitude or Primitive & Unconfined Recreation

Opportunities for solitude exist in some sheltered coves and along the southern portion of the area near the existing Southern Nantahala Wilderness. Although Cherry Cove area has opportunities for primitive recreation, it has no NFS trails and receives very little use except for hunting by nearby residents. Several narrow arms of NFS lands to the north, east, and west are less than 0.1 miles wide in places. These slivers of NFS land are bounded by private ownership on three sides and confine recreation users to a very limited land base. Within the core area that is Inventoried Roadless Area, more solitude is possible;

however, even this area has long range views of development to the north, which impacts wilderness characteristics.

Other Values - Unique and Outstanding Qualities

Features of this area are common within the context of the Southern Appalachian Mountains and are not particularly unique.

Size & Manageability

The Cherry Cove area is approximately 1,159 acres and is adjacent to the Southern Nantahala Wilderness and, if recommended, would be considered an extension to the wilderness. The core of the area contains 821 acres of Inventoried Roadless Area, but there are three narrow protrusions surrounded by private lands. These slivers of NFS land confine recreation users and would be difficult to manage for preservation of wilderness characteristics. There are approximately 83 acres of outstanding or reserved subsurface mineral rights in the western protrusion. Sights and sounds of civilization are evident, especially in these protrusions, and adversely affect solitude. Reshaping the area to the core 821 acres of Inventoried Roadless Area would better enable management for wilderness characteristics.

Summary

Much of the Cherry Cove area has a natural appearance and there are opportunities for primitive recreation; however, solitude and unconfined recreation are limited due to the boundary configuration and adjacent land uses along the three narrow protrusions. There are outstanding or reserved subsurface mineral rights within the western protrusion. Although the area is relatively small, this area would be considered as an extension to the Southern Nantahala Wilderness. Within the area that is Inventoried Roadless Area, more solitude is possible and recreation is less confined, however, even this portion of the area contains long range views of development to the north, which impacts solitude.

Quantitative Summary of Items/Activities within the Cherry Cove Area

Disclaimer: Information was generated from FS spatial datasets. All figures are approximate.

Description of Area	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Spruce-Fir Ecozone:	acres	0
Northern Hardwood Ecozone:	acres	0.4
High Elevation Red Oak Ecozone:	acres	0.1
Acidic Cove Ecozone:	acres	141.4
Rich Cove Ecozone:	acres	338.9
Mesic Oak Ecozone:	acres	638.6
Dry-Mesic Oak Ecozone:	acres	7.4
Dry Oak Ecozone:	acres	0.1
Pine-Oak/Heath Ecozone:	acres	24.3
Shortleaf Pine Ecozone:	acres	1.5
Alluvial Forest Ecozone:	acres	0

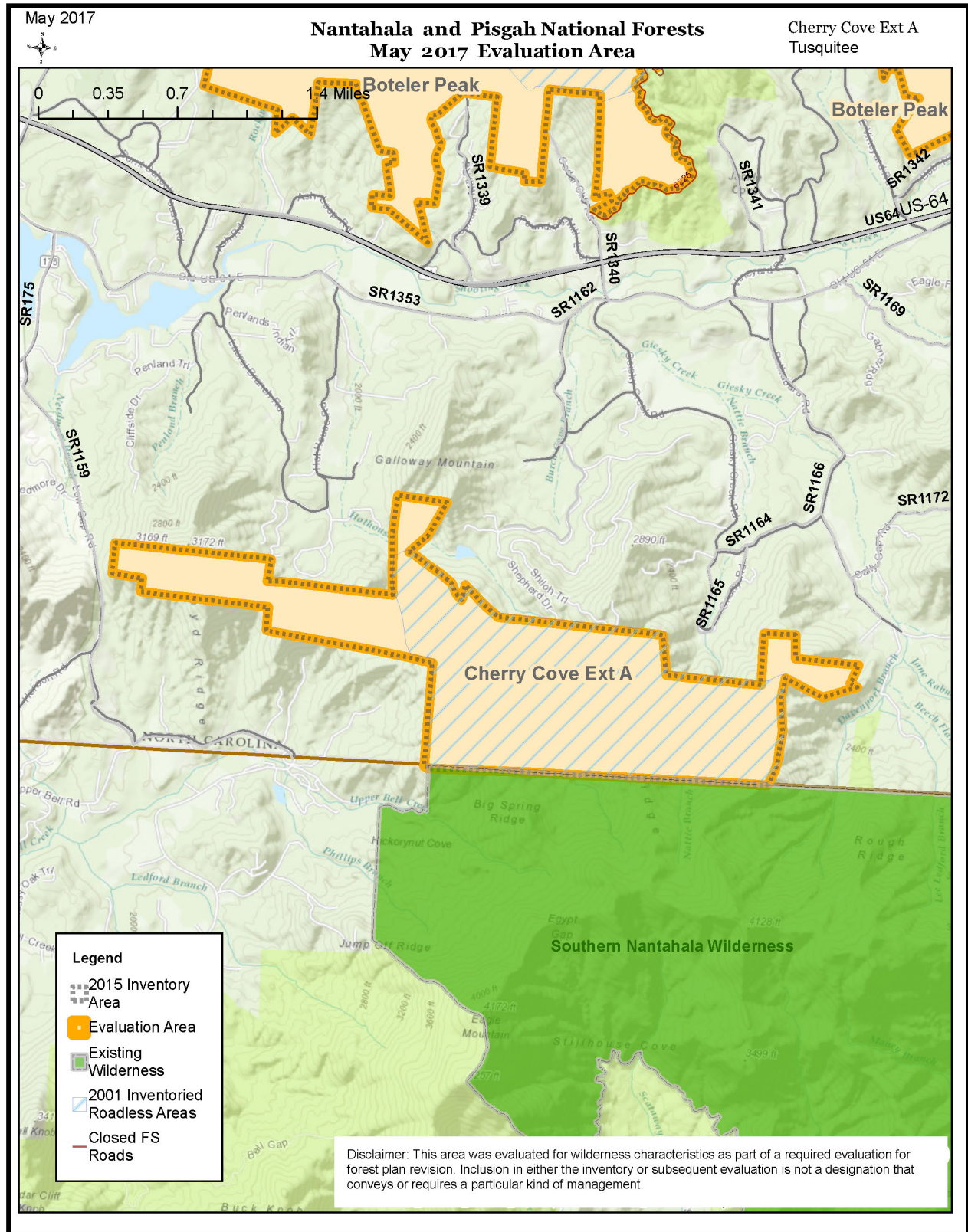
Apparent Naturalness	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Maintenance Level 1 National Forest System Roads:	miles	0
Closed Maintenance Level 2 National Forest System Roads:	miles	0
Road Stream Crossings, Bridge:	number	0
Road Stream Crossings, Other:	number	0
Trail Stream Crossings, Bridge:	number	0
Vegetation Management, 0-20 years old:	acres	0
Vegetation Management, 21-40 years old:	acres	0
Maintained Wildlife Fields (may overlap Bald Management Area):	acres	0
Existing Wilderness Study Area (WSA):	acres	0
Existing Inventoried Roadless Area (IRA may overlap WSA):	acres	821.0

Solitude or Primitive & Unconfined Recreation	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Current Backcountry Management Area (may overlap WSA & IRA):	acres	0
Inventoried Primitive Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) Setting:	acres	0
Inventoried Semi-Primitive Non-Motorized ROS Setting:	acres	731.2

	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Solitude or Primitive & Unconfined Recreation		
Inventoried Semi-Primitive Motorized ROS Setting (buffer of adjacent roads):	acres	0
Inventoried Roded Natural ROS Setting (buffer of adjacent roads):	acres	424.6
National Forest System Trail, Hike-only Allowed Use:	miles	0
National Forest System Trail, Hike-Bike Allowed Use:	miles	0
National Forest System Trail, Hike-Horse Allowed Use:	miles	0
National Forest System Trail, Hike-Bike-Horse Allowed Use:	miles	0

	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Unique & Outstanding Features		
Current Special Interest Management Area (scenic, geologic, botanical, zoological):	acres	0
Current Designated Wild & Scenic River Corridor (1/4 mile each side):	acres	0
Current Eligible Wild & Scenic River Corridor (1/4 mile each side):	acres	0
Research Natural Area:	acres	0

	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Size & Manageability		
Area, Total:	acres	1,159.3
Private/Non-Federal Inholdings, Total:	acres	0
Private/Non-Federal Inholdings, Count:	number	0
Outstanding or Reserved Subsurface Mineral Rights:	acres	82.8
Current Bald Management Area:	acres	0
Forest Research Plots, Count:	number	0



Name: Chunky Gal Extension

Acres: 7,785 acres

Description of Area

Location & Access

The Chunky Gal area is in Clay County, NC, on the Tusquitee Ranger District of the Nantahala National Forest. The area is adjacent to the congressionally designated Southern Nantahala Wilderness and is located between US64 to the north and west, Deep Gap Road (NFSR71) to the east, and the Shooting Creek community to the west. Access to the area is from US64, NFSR71, and SR1169 as well as Chunky Gal Trail, Appalachian National Scenic Trail, and Bly Gap Trail. Several closed low maintenance level NFS roads also provide equestrian, mountain bike, and foot travel access to the area.

Surroundings

The area's boundaries provide a relatively consolidated block of NFS land, and although it is long and narrow in shape, much of the area is adjacent to Southern Nantahala Wilderness or other NFS lands. The northwestern portion of the area forms a large "peninsula" encircled by US64 and NFSR71; the latter of which is seasonally open to vehicular traffic. The northeastern boundary along NFSR71 separates the area from another potential addition to wilderness inventory area called "Southern Nantahala Extension".

The exception to adjacency of NFS lands are private tracts to the west and southwest in Giesky Creek and Eagle Fork Creek communities, and at Kitty Ridge/Ravenrock Ridge where a residence sits immediately adjacent to the boundary. Uses in these areas are a mix of forested lands, residential developments, and agriculture. Further to the west in the Shooting Creek community, there is a dense concentration of commercial, agricultural, and residential development. There is one non-federal inholding within the area near Sharptop Ridge.

Topography & Vegetation

The defining features of the area are Chunky Gal Mountain, which bisects the area from north to south, and Yellow Mountain paralleling it to the east. Most of the area has steep terrain with elevations ranging from over 5,000 feet on Yellow Mountain to approximately 2,330 feet at Dave Barrett Creek. Views to the west into the Shooting Creek valley are not shielded by landforms in the northern part of the area near Riley Knob, but are shielded to some degree further south toward Whiteoak Stamp.

Portions of the area have old growth characteristics and there is a rare high-elevation bog at Whiteoak Stamp. A broad range of ecozones are represented in the area, including northern hardwood, high elevation red oak, acidic cove, rich cove, mesic oak, and pine-oak-heath.

Current Uses

The Chunky Gal Extension area is managed for backcountry recreation, scenery, wildlife habitat, timber, and botanical special interest area. Approximately 3,983 acres are identified as an Inventoried Roadless Area; 2,563 acres of which are currently managed as backcountry. Approximately 800 acres are managed as the Riley Knob and Whiteoak Stamp botanical Special Interest Areas. A portion of the area is also managed as a scenic corridor for the Appalachian National Scenic Trail.

The area is popular for hunting, fishing, hiking, backpacking, and gathering forest products. There are three NFS trails in the area designated as hike-only: Chunky Gal Trail (NFST77), the Appalachian National Scenic Trail (NFST1), and Bly Gap Trail (NFST84).

There is recent timber management in the area with 240 acres in the 21-40 year age class and 67 acres in the 0-20 year age class. These activities are located to the east off NFSR71 and to the southwest off of NFSR6230 and 6230C; the latter of which are closed to public vehicular traffic. There are also 6.8 acres of maintained wildlife fields and a total of 4.8 miles of closed low maintenance level NFS road in the area.

Evaluation of Wilderness Characteristics

Apparent Naturalness

Portions of the Chunky Gal area have natural appearing forests, and the Special Interest Areas at Riley Knob and Whiteoak Stamp are maintained for old growth characteristics and intact high-elevation bog habitat, respectively. Much of the area has been managed for backcountry recreation and is untouched by recent timber or wildlife management. This is particularly true in the Inventoried Roadless Areas at Chunky Gal Mountain and Sharptop Ridge.

Between Chunky Gal Mountain and Yellow Mountain is a closed low maintenance level road (NFSR71D) which is maintained as a linear wildlife opening over its entire length, and bisects the area almost to Southern Nantahala Wilderness. There are also recent timber management activities in the Yellow Mountain area. To the southwest, between Sharptop Ridge and Bly Gap Trail, are other NFS roads and recent timber harvests. These human modifications adversely affect naturalness in their immediate vicinities but do not affect apparent naturalness of the area as a whole.

Opportunities for Solitude or Primitive & Unconfined Recreation

The area offers opportunities for solitude, primarily in parts of the Chunky Gal Mountain and Sharptop Ridge IRAs. However, the adjacent US64 and NFSR71 encircle the area's northern third and impact solitude with the sights and sounds of vehicles. Other impacts to solitude in this northern area are agricultural, commercial, and residential uses visible to the west in Shooting Creek community. Further to the southwest in the Eagle Fork Creek area, there are also views of private developments and farmlands. Other impacts to solitude come from the heavy use along the Appalachian Trail in the through-hiking seasons of spring and fall. These impacts are largely confined to the immediate vicinity of the trail. Outside these peak use seasons, visitor encounters would be less likely.

The area offers many opportunities for primitive recreation, such as hiking, backpacking, hunting, and fishing. In areas adjacent to Southern Nantahala Wilderness, recreation users are unconfined with unfettered access to thousands of acres of wild and unroaded NFS lands. Conversely, the area's northern "peninsula" encircled by US64 and NFSR71 confine recreation users to this relatively narrow strip of land. This boundary configuration and shape affects much of the northern area and is not conducive to providing unconfined recreation.

Other Values - Unique or Outstanding Qualities

Although the area serves as a scenic backdrop for US64 and nearby communities, most of the area possesses common characteristics within the context of the Southern Appalachian Mountains. However, there are over 450 acres of unique old growth White Oak forest and high-elevation bog identified as Special Interest Areas within the Chunky Gal Extension area.

Size & Manageability

The Chunky Gal Extension area is approximately 7,785 acres in size and most of the southeastern border is adjacent to the Southern Nantahala Wilderness. The northern portion of the area is a long and relatively narrow "peninsula" encircled by US64 and NFSR71. Although the majority of area boundaries are adjacent to NFS lands, sights and sounds of US64 and nearby communities are evident from much of

the area; especially in the northern third. This northern boundary configuration and adjacent land use adversely affect opportunities for unconfined recreation and for solitude. There is also a private inholding east of Sharptop Ridge; approximately five miles of closed low maintenance level NFS road being maintained as linear wildlife openings; and approximately 293 acres of outstanding or reserved subsurface mineral rights in the area. These conditions adversely affect management for wilderness characteristics from certain locations within the area.

Two portions of the area adjacent to the existing wilderness (including parts of the IRAs) could be managed to preserve wilderness characteristics of apparent naturalness and opportunities for solitude or primitive and unconfined recreation. While these parts of the IRA would each be less than 5,000 acres, they would be considered as extensions to the existing Southern Nantahala wilderness.

Summary

The Chunky Gal Extension inventory area includes low maintenance level NFS roads, recent timber harvests, and maintained wildlife fields that detract from naturalness in their immediate vicinity. The northern boundary's shape and configuration confine recreation users to a relatively small area surrounded by a state highway. Opportunities for solitude are adversely affected in this northern area by sights and sounds of the adjacent highway and highly developed communities to the west.

The southwest portion of the area, adjacent to the Southern Nantahala Wilderness (Sharptop Ridge Inventoried Roadless Area), and the Chunky Gal Inventoried Roadless Area, have a higher degree of wilderness characteristics compared to the northern portion outside the IRA. While these areas are less than 5,000 acres, they are of sufficient size as to make practicable their preservation and use in an unimpaired condition because they are adjacent to an existing wilderness.

Quantitative Summary of Items/Activities within the Chunky Gal Extension Area

Disclaimer: Information was generated from FS spatial datasets. All figures are approximate.

Description of Area	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Spruce-Fir Ecozone:	acres	26.8
Northern Hardwood Ecozone:	acres	941.0
High Elevation Red Oak Ecozone:	acres	492.0
Acidic Cove Ecozone:	acres	1,465.1
Rich Cove Ecozone:	acres	2,810.3
Mesic Oak Ecozone:	acres	1,560.5
Dry-Mesic Oak Ecozone:	acres	15.3
Dry Oak Ecozone:	acres	89.5
Pine-Oak/Heath Ecozone:	acres	323.4
Shortleaf Pine Ecozone:	acres	0
Alluvial Forest Ecozone:	acres	0

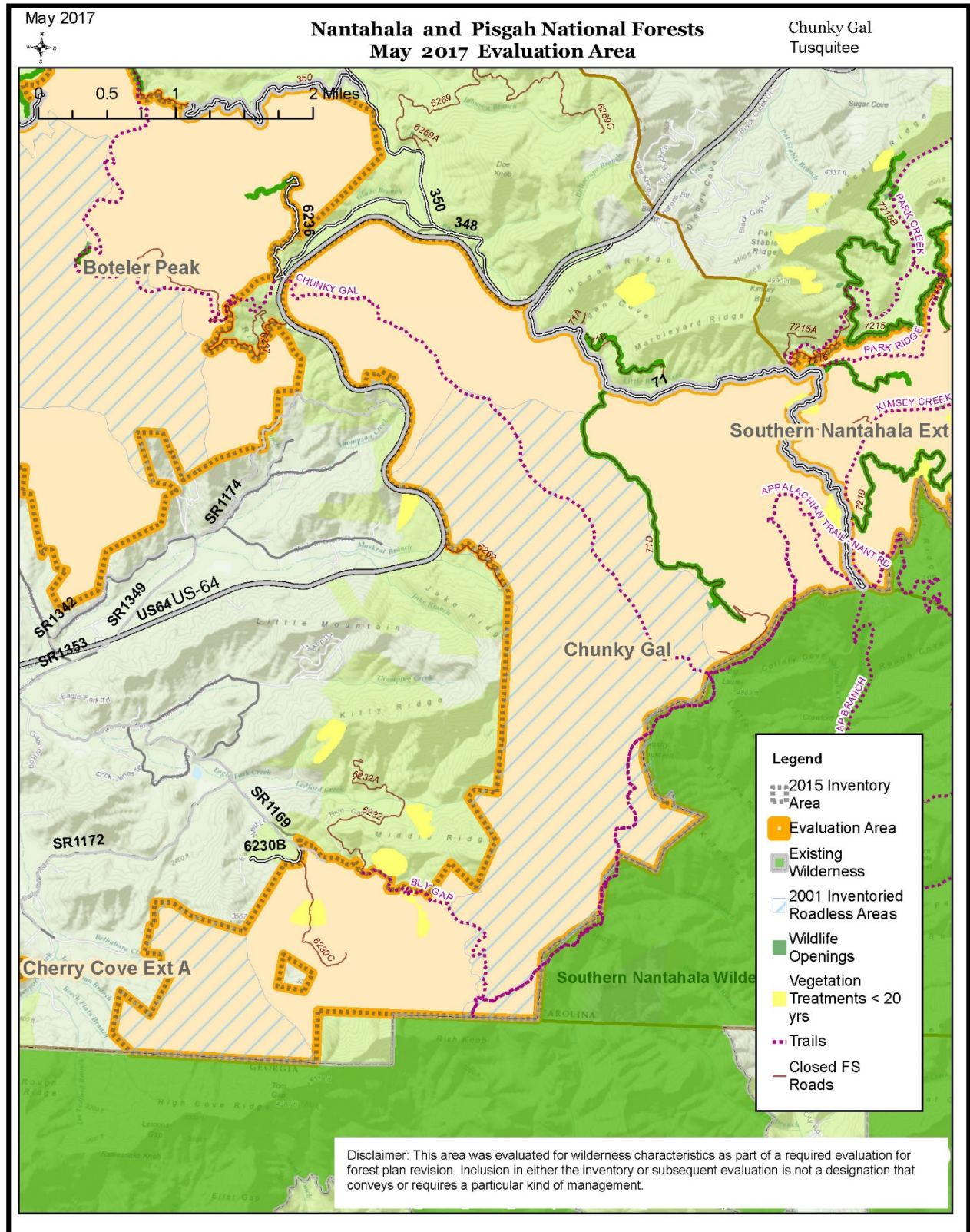
Apparent Naturalness	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Maintenance Level 1 National Forest System Roads:	miles	0
Closed Maintenance Level 2 National Forest System Roads:	miles	4.8
Road Stream Crossings, Bridge:	number	0
Road Stream Crossings, Other:	number	4
Trail Stream Crossings, Bridge:	number	0
Vegetation Management, 0-20 years old:	acres	66.5
Vegetation Management, 21-40 years old:	acres	239.2
Maintained Wildlife Fields (may overlap Bald Management Area):	acres	6.8
Existing Wilderness Study Area (WSA):	acres	0
Existing Inventoried Roadless Area (IRA may overlap WSA):	acres	3,983.4

Solitude or Primitive & Unconfined Recreation	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Current Backcountry Management Area (may overlap WSA & IRA):	acres	2,562.8
Inventoried Primitive Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) Setting:	acres	0
Inventoried Semi-Primitive Non-Motorized ROS Setting:	acres	2,665.5

	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Solitude or Primitive & Unconfined Recreation		
Inventoried Semi-Primitive Motorized ROS Setting (buffer of adjacent roads):	acres	2,006.5
Inventoried Roded Natural ROS Setting (buffer of adjacent roads):	acres	3,055.7
National Forest System Trail, Hike-only Allowed Use:	miles	15.2
National Forest System Trail, Hike-Bike Allowed Use:	miles	0
National Forest System Trail, Hike-Horse Allowed Use:	miles	0
National Forest System Trail, Hike-Bike-Horse Allowed Use:	miles	0

	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Unique & Outstanding Features		
Current Special Interest Management Area (scenic, geologic, botanical, zoological):	acres	310.1
Current Designated Wild & Scenic River Corridor (1/4 mile each side):	acres	0
Current Eligible Wild & Scenic River Corridor (1/4 mile each side):	acres	0
Research Natural Area:	acres	0

	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Size & Manageability		
Area, Total:	acres	7,785.5
Private/Non-Federal Inholdings, Total:	acres	26.8
Private/Non-Federal Inholdings, Count:	number	1
Outstanding or Reserved Subsurface Mineral Rights:	acres	293.1
Current Bald Management Area:	acres	0
Forest Research Plots, Count:	number	4



Name: Piercy Mountain Range

Acres: 9,109 acres

Description of Area

Location & Access

The Piercy Mountain Range area is located about four miles northeast of Andrews, NC. It is located on both the Nantahala and Tusquitee Ranger Districts of the Nantahala National Forest and is in Macon and Cherokee Counties. The area is southeast of US 19/74/129, northwest of SR1401, and west of SR1310 and Nantahala Lake. Access is from area roads and several trails including Junaluska Gap Trail, Appletree Trail, London Bald Trail, and Bartram National Recreation Trail. There are several miles of low maintenance level roads in the area including NFSR7208 and its various spurs; these are all closed to public vehicular traffic but open to horses, bicycles, and foot travel.

Surroundings

The area is bordered by NFS lands to the northeast and southwest, with private lands to the west and southeast, and is almost completely bounded by US highways, State Roads, and open NFS roads. The community of Topton lies to the northwest, the town of Andrews is to the west, and the Nantahala NF's Appletree Group Campground is located just outside the area's boundary on the southeast side. Nantahala Dam and reservoir lies to the east and a Duke Energy power substation, bypass penstock, and surge tank sits to the north near the Nantahala River at Beechertown.

Topography & Vegetation

The area generally lies in a southwestern to northeastern orientation, with a high ridge running most of its length. This topography allows for many views of the surrounding area. Elevations range from 4,596 feet at London Bald to about 2,200 feet at Junaluska Creek near the southwestern corner. The steep northwest facing slopes contain numerous minor ridges and streams, with the southern-most portion flowing to the Valley River and the northern-most flowing to the Nantahala River at the head of Nantahala Gorge. The southeastern side also has steep slopes which extend a greater distance to the east as the area extends toward Junaluska Creek, SR 1505, and SR 1401.

The area is characterized by high mountains, dense forests with some old growth characteristics, heath balds, and clear streams. Dominant ecozones include rich cove, acidic cove, dry mesic oak, mesic oak, pine-oak-heath.

Current Uses

The area is currently managed for dispersed recreation, scenery, timber, and wildlife. There are over 640 acres of timber harvest in the 21-40 year age class, 55 acres in the 0-20 year age class, and 21.6 acres of permanently maintained wildlife fields. The area also has 16.6 miles of low maintenance level NFS roads which are closed to public vehicular access, but open to horseback riding, mountain biking, and foot travel. The area is popular for hunting, fishing, backpacking, and gathering forest products. Additionally, the area has 30 miles of hike-only NFS trails including the Bartram National Recreation Trail.

The area lies between Duke Energy facilities at Nantahala Lake and the Beechertown power substation. A bypass penstock (large visible pipe) passes under the Piercy Mountain Range area through a tunnel for several miles from Nantahala Lake to Beechertown. There is also a power transmission line that crosses the area on the west side.

Evaluation of Wilderness Characteristics

Apparent Naturalness

The Piercy Mountain Range area has natural appearing locations in its sheltered coves, high ridges, and steep slopes. However, NFS roads, skid roads, maintained wildlife fields, and recent timber harvest activities are evident in many locations. There is also a power transmission line on the west side near Topton. All of these management actions, modifications, and infrastructure improvements detract from the area's apparent naturalness.

Opportunities for Solitude or Primitive & Unconfined Recreation

Some locations within Piercy Mountain Range area have opportunities for solitude, but there are many locations where sights and sounds of surrounding roads, residential developments, agricultural lands, and commercial properties detract from solitude. Some residential and commercial uses are located immediately adjacent to area boundaries. For example, a Duke Energy substation with a penstock and surge tank is visible to the north; a powerline passes through the area to the west; there is residential property to the east and west; and in the town of Andrews to the west.

With 30 miles of hike-only NFS trails, the area does offer opportunities for primitive recreation. Other primitive recreation uses include hunting, fishing, horseback riding, nature study, and forest products gathering; however, mountain biking is allowed on NFS roads within the area. Configuration of area boundaries and the narrow shape of the area tend to confine recreation use. The entire southwestern half of the area is relatively narrow with many small protrusions surrounded by private lands and several parts of Piercy Mountain Range area are less than one mile wide, which inhibits opportunities for unconfined recreation.

Other Values - Unique or Outstanding Qualities

The area serves as a scenic backdrop for Andrews, Topton, Nantahala River, Nantahala Lake, and surrounding areas. The Trail of Tears crosses through the area. There are occurrences of rare plant communities in the area; however, the area has no unique or outstanding qualities within the context of the Southern Appalachian Mountains.

Size & Manageability

The Piercy Mountain Range area is 9,109 acres in size, however some of the boundaries are highly irregular with numerous protrusions and narrow width that compromise manageability. There are 143 acres of outstanding or reserved subsurface mineral rights and a Duke Energy penstock passes through a tunnel under the area.

Summary

The Piercy Mountain Range area has many locations where modifications to the natural-appearing landscape are evident; where solitude is adversely impacted by adjacent land uses; and where boundary configuration and shape confine recreation use to narrow fingers of NFS land. The area does not have unique or outstanding qualities within the context of the Southern Appalachians.

Quantitative Summary of Items/Activities within the Piercy Mountain Range Area

Disclaimer: Information was generated from FS spatial datasets. All figures are approximate.

Description of Area	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Spruce-Fir Ecozone:	acres	20.3
Northern Hardwood Ecozone:	acres	138.1
High Elevation Red Oak Ecozone:	acres	545.3
Acidic Cove Ecozone:	acres	2,002.3
Rich Cove Ecozone:	acres	3,271.0
Mesic Oak Ecozone:	acres	807.0
Dry-Mesic Oak Ecozone:	acres	1,100.7
Dry Oak Ecozone:	acres	444.7
Pine-Oak/Heath Ecozone:	acres	757.7
Shortleaf Pine Ecozone:	acres	12.7
Alluvial Forest Ecozone:	acres	1.2

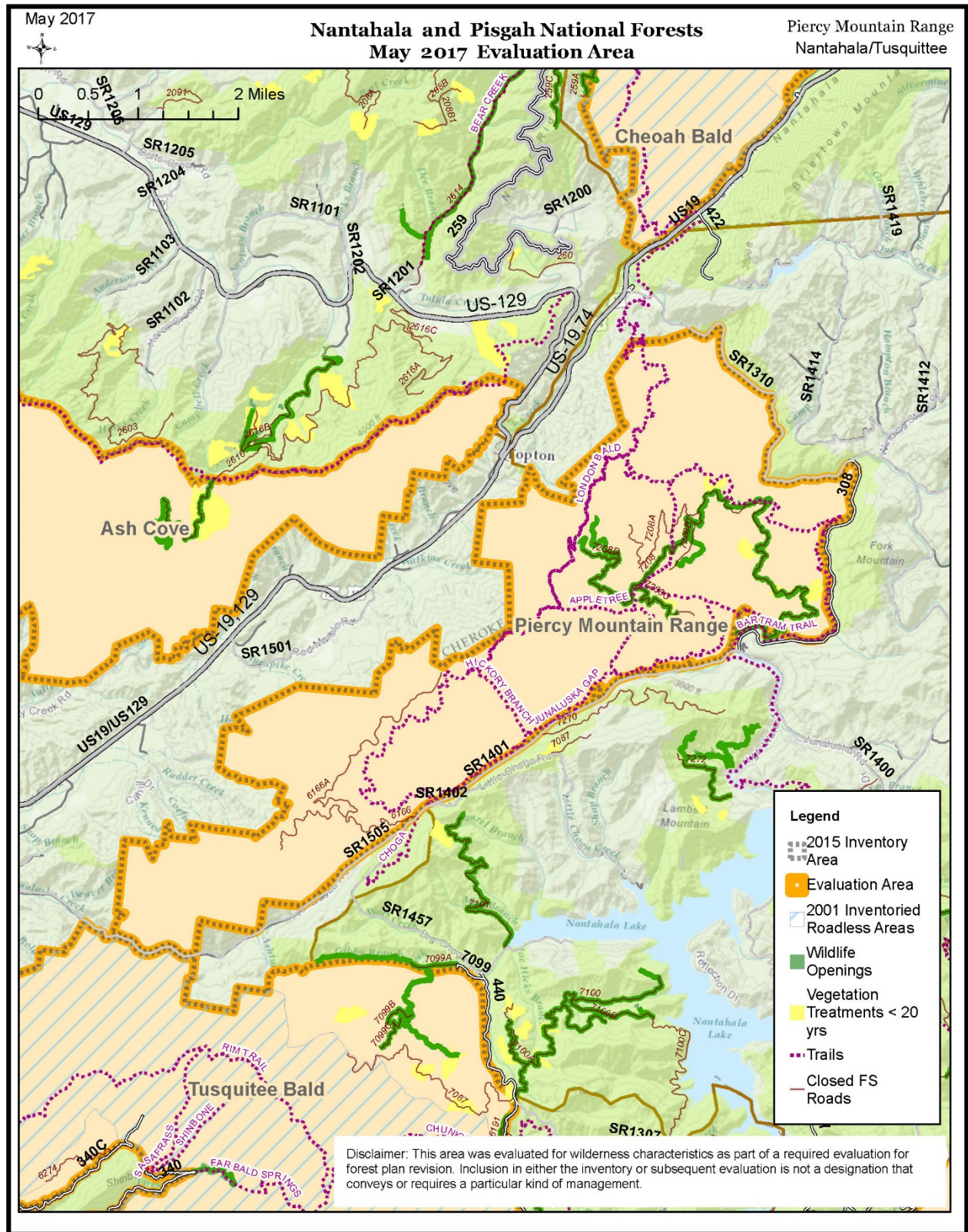
Apparent Naturalness	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Maintenance Level 1 National Forest System Roads:	miles	2.1
Closed Maintenance Level 2 National Forest System Roads:	miles	14.5
Road Stream Crossings, Bridge:	number	0
Road Stream Crossings, Other:	number	9
Trail Stream Crossings, Bridge:	number	0
Vegetation Management, 0-20 years old:	acres	55.4
Vegetation Management, 21-40 years old:	acres	642.6
Maintained Wildlife Fields (may overlap Bald Management Area):	acres	21.6
Existing Wilderness Study Area (WSA):	acres	0
Existing Inventoried Roadless Area (IRA may overlap WSA):	acres	0

Solitude or Primitive & Unconfined Recreation	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Current Backcountry Management Area (may overlap WSA & IRA):	acres	0
Inventoried Primitive Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) Setting:	acres	0

	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Solitude or Primitive & Unconfined Recreation		
Inventoried Semi-Primitive Non-Motorized ROS Setting:	acres	1,860.5
Inventoried Semi-Primitive Motorized ROS Setting (buffer of adjacent roads):	acres	3,278.1
Inventoried Roaded Natural ROS Setting (buffer of adjacent roads):	acres	3,969.7
National Forest System Trail, Hike-only Allowed Use:	miles	30.0
National Forest System Trail, Hike-Bike Allowed Use:	miles	0
National Forest System Trail, Hike-Horse Allowed Use:	miles	0
National Forest System Trail, Hike-Bike-Horse Allowed Use:	miles	0

	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Unique & Outstanding Features		
Current Special Interest Management Area (scenic, geologic, botanical, zoological):	acres	0
Current Designated Wild & Scenic River Corridor (1/4 mile each side):	acres	0
Current Eligible Wild & Scenic River Corridor (1/4 mile each side):	acres	844.8
Research Natural Area:	acres	0

	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Size & Manageability		
Area, Total:	acres	9,108.8
Private/Non-Federal Inholdings, Total:	acres	0
Private/Non-Federal Inholdings, Count:	number	0
Outstanding or Reserved Subsurface Mineral Rights:	acres	142.8
Current Bald Management Area:	acres	0
Forest Research Plots, Count:	number	1



Name: Tusquitee Bald

Acres: 29,156 acres

Description of Area

Location & Access

The Tusquitee Bald area is located south of Andrews, NC, in Macon, Clay, and Cherokee Counties on the Tusquitee Ranger District of the Nantahala National Forest. The area encompasses almost the entire Fires Creek watershed, and extends northwest to National Forest (NF) boundaries near Andrews, southeast to NF boundaries near Hayesville, and northeast to Tuni Gap.

Access is from numerous NFS roads, including 340, 340A, 340C, 427A, and 440. There are several trailhead access points along these roads. Trails in the area include Rim Trail, Leatherwood Loop, Cover Trail, Omphus Ridge Trail, Bristol Trail, Trail Ridge Trail, Bald Springs Trail, Sassafras Trail, Chunky Gal Trail, and others.

Surroundings

The area is bordered by private lands to the north and south, and NFS lands to the east and west. The town of Andrews, residential developments, commercial properties, agricultural lands, a municipal airfield, and US19 lie to the north. The town of Hayesville and community of Tusquitee lie to the south, where there are residential developments, commercial properties, agricultural lands, a grass airstrip, and US64 and other State roads. Just beyond NFS lands to the east, is Nantahala Lake which has residential development along parts of its shoreline. To the west is the community of Peachtree.

A central corridor along Fires Creek Road (NFSR340) is excluded from the area and extends over eight miles into the area. National Forest developed recreation facilities in this corridor include Fires Creek Hunt Camp, Fires Creek Picnic Area, and Bristol Horse Camp. Some of these facilities have a relatively high level of development, with vault toilets, paved trails, and steel-truss foot bridges.

Topography & Vegetation

The Tusquitee Bald area consists of a horseshoe-shaped rim of steep and rugged mountains, ranging in elevation from 1,900 feet to 5,200 feet. In places, the "Rim" is very narrow with steep slopes to each side. Locations inside the "Rim" are completely sheltered from views of private lands beyond the Fires Creek drainage. However, area boundaries extend to NF ownership beyond the "Rim" where the topography allows for views of Andrews, Hayesville, Tusquitee and other communities in the surrounding area.

Portions of the area have dense hardwood forests on the ridges and side slopes, with rhododendron and hemlock in the drainages; however, most of the hemlocks are dead due to infestations of the hemlock woolly adelgid. Ecozones within the area include acidic cove, rich cove, pine-oak/heath, mesic oak, northern hardwood, high elevation red oak, dry mesic oak, dry oak, and shortleaf pine. Some stands within the area have old growth characteristics, particularly to the east near Tusquitee Bald.

Current Uses

The Tusquitee Bald area is currently managed for dispersed recreation (including backcountry), scenery, wildlife, and timber. The area is a recreation destination popular with hikers, backpackers, horseback riders, hunters, and anglers. The area has two long distance hiking trails, Rim Trail and Chunky Gal Trail. Many trails in the area (including parts of Rim Trail) are open to horseback riding and connect to Fires Creek Road and Bristol Horse Camp, both of which are outside the area boundaries. Closed NFS roads in

the area allow for hiking, hunting, horseback riding, and mountain biking; although there are no NFS trails designated for mountain bike use in the area

The area has extensive backcountry recreation opportunities with over 13,600 acres on the eastern side of the area within the Tusquitee Bald Inventoried Roadless Area and approximately 9,300 acres managed as backcountry.

In addition to a recreation emphasis, parts of the area are actively managed for timber and wildlife. There are over 280 acres of timber harvests ranging from 0-20 years old and almost 770 acres which are 21-40 years old. There are approximately 26 acres of maintained wildlife fields in the area and about 15 miles of low maintenance level NFS roads, many of which have culverts and one with a bridge.

Evaluation of Wilderness Characteristics

Apparent Naturalness

Many locations within Tusquitee Bald area have natural appearing conditions. This is particularly true along parts of the “Rim”, in the old-growth forests, and in the Inventoried Roadless Area, which is over 13,000 acres in size. Parts of the area outside the Inventoried Roadless Area have recent vegetation treatments, maintained wildlife fields, and low maintenance level roads. Some of the roads have culverts and one has a vehicular bridge. There are remnants of concrete footings from an historic fire tower that once stood at Big Stamp, and over 160 acres of private inholdings where the FS has little influence over future uses. These human modifications, infrastructure, and private inholdings are distributed across the area, and not concentrated in any one location.

Opportunities for Solitude or Primitive & Unconfined Recreation

The Tusquitee Bald area provides opportunities for solitude in many locations, especially the eastern portion within the Inventoried Roadless Area. The long-distance trail network and large area offering a semi-primitive non-motorized setting provide many opportunities for recreating without crossing open roads or encountering other visitors. This remote character is especially prevalent along Rim Trail and Chunky Gal Trail to the southeast near Tusquitee Bald, Potrock Bald, and Matlock Bald.

Sights and sounds of civilization are more frequent north and south of the “Rim” where slopes are oriented toward the towns Andrews, Hayesville, Tusquitee, and other surrounding communities. Near the Fires Creek corridor, where there are FS developed recreation sites, mowed wildlife fields, and open NFS roads, opportunities for solitude are less likely; however, these sights and sounds of civilization are not pervasive across the entire area.

Opportunities for primitive recreation are available throughout the area, including hiking, backpacking, horseback riding, hunting, and fishing. Mountain biking is allowed on closed NFS roads in the area, but there are no NFS trails designated for mountain bike use. Overall, the size and configuration of the area allows for unconfined recreation, especially to the east in the large block of unroaded NFS land managed as backcountry and Inventoried Roadless Area. In locations north of the “Rim” near Andrews, and south of the “Rim” near Tusquitee and Hayesville, recreation users are more confined to areas between adjacent private lands and the ridgetop. These areas are typically less than a mile wide, and in some cases, are only 1/3 of a mile downslope from the “Rim”.

Other Values - Unique or Outstanding Qualities

With the Valley River Mountains on the north side and the Tusquitee Mountains on the south, these landforms converge at Tusquitee Bald to form the “Rim”; which encircles the Fires Creek watershed and offers many scenic vistas. Fires Creek and the “Rim” are valued because of the unique recreation

opportunities they provide. The Rim Trail creates a 25 mile ridgetop loop offering expansive views of the Nantahala Mountains to the east and the Snowbird Mountains to the north, and the mountains of Georgia and Tennessee are visible in the distance. Almost all of the “Rim” and the Fires Creek watershed are public lands managed by the Nantahala NF, and there is no other place in western North Carolina where the landform and almost contiguous public ownership allow a long-distance, ridgetop, loop-trail opportunity for backpackers. The remote character of some trail segments only enhances this experience.

Fires Creek watershed has also been identified as having outstanding resource waters by the North Carolina Division of Environmental Quality, is a very popular trout fishery, and the area contains habitats for rare plants, including mountain camellia, and animals. Additionally, the Andrews and Tusquitee areas are culturally and historically significant because segments of the Trail of Tears pass nearby.

Size & Manageability

The Tusquitee Bald area contains a core area of over 13,000 acres of inventoried semi-primitive non-motorized ROS area and Inventoried Roadless Area. The Fires Creek Road creates an open road corridor that extends into the area for almost eight miles from west to east, providing access to developed recreation sites and timber management areas in the interior of the watershed.

North of Fires Creek there are several NFS roads, recent vegetation treatments, and a 50 acre private inholding. The slopes north of the “Rim” look directly down on the town of Andrews and the surrounding community. On the south side of the Fires Creek watershed there are fewer NFS roads and vegetation treatments; however, more of the land base lies south of the “Rim” overlooking toward the town of Hayesville and its surrounding communities.

The eastern part of the Tusquitee Bald area is comprised primarily of the Inventoried Roadless Area and backcountry management area. This portion of the area provides thousands of acres where there are natural appearing forests with old growth characteristics, opportunities for solitude, and opportunities for primitive and unconfined recreation. Some locations within this eastern portion of the area also have NFS roads, private inholdings, and views of Andrews or Hayesville, but at its core the area offers a high degree of wilderness characteristics.

Summary

At over 29,000 acres, the Tusquitee Bald area is the largest in the Nantahala and Pisgah National Forest’s inventory of areas that may be suitable for inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System. Consequently, characteristics of such a large area differ greatly for specific locations based on past and current management, boundary configurations, presence of constructed features, adjacent land uses, topography, etc. North of Fires Creek there are several NFS roads, recent vegetation treatments, and a 50 acre private inholding. The slopes north of the “Rim” look down on the town of Andrews and the surrounding community. On the south side of the Fires Creek watershed there are fewer NFS roads and vegetation treatments; however, more of the land base lies south of the “Rim” with views toward the town of Hayesville and its surrounding communities.

With over 13,000 acres of Inventoried Roadless Area, Tusquitee Bald area provides a setting where there are natural appearing forests with old growth characteristics, opportunities for solitude, and opportunities for primitive and unconfined recreation. The core semi-primitive non-motorized portion of this area has a higher degree of wilderness characteristics compared to areas which are closer to open roads, FS recreation facilities, private development, and other sights and sounds of civilization.

Quantitative Summary of Items/Activities in the Tusquitee Bald Area

Disclaimer: Information was generated from FS spatial datasets. All figures are approximate.

Description of Area	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Spruce-Fir Ecozone:	acres	152.5
Northern Hardwood Ecozone:	acres	2,800.0
High Elevation Red Oak Ecozone:	acres	1,536.3
Acidic Cove Ecozone:	acres	8,844.9
Rich Cove Ecozone:	acres	4,934.5
Mesic Oak Ecozone:	acres	3,353.3
Dry-Mesic Oak Ecozone:	acres	1,439.9
Dry Oak Ecozone:	acres	1,125.1
Pine-Oak/Heath Ecozone:	acres	4,526.8
Shortleaf Pine Ecozone:	acres	423.2
Alluvial Forest Ecozone:	acres	0

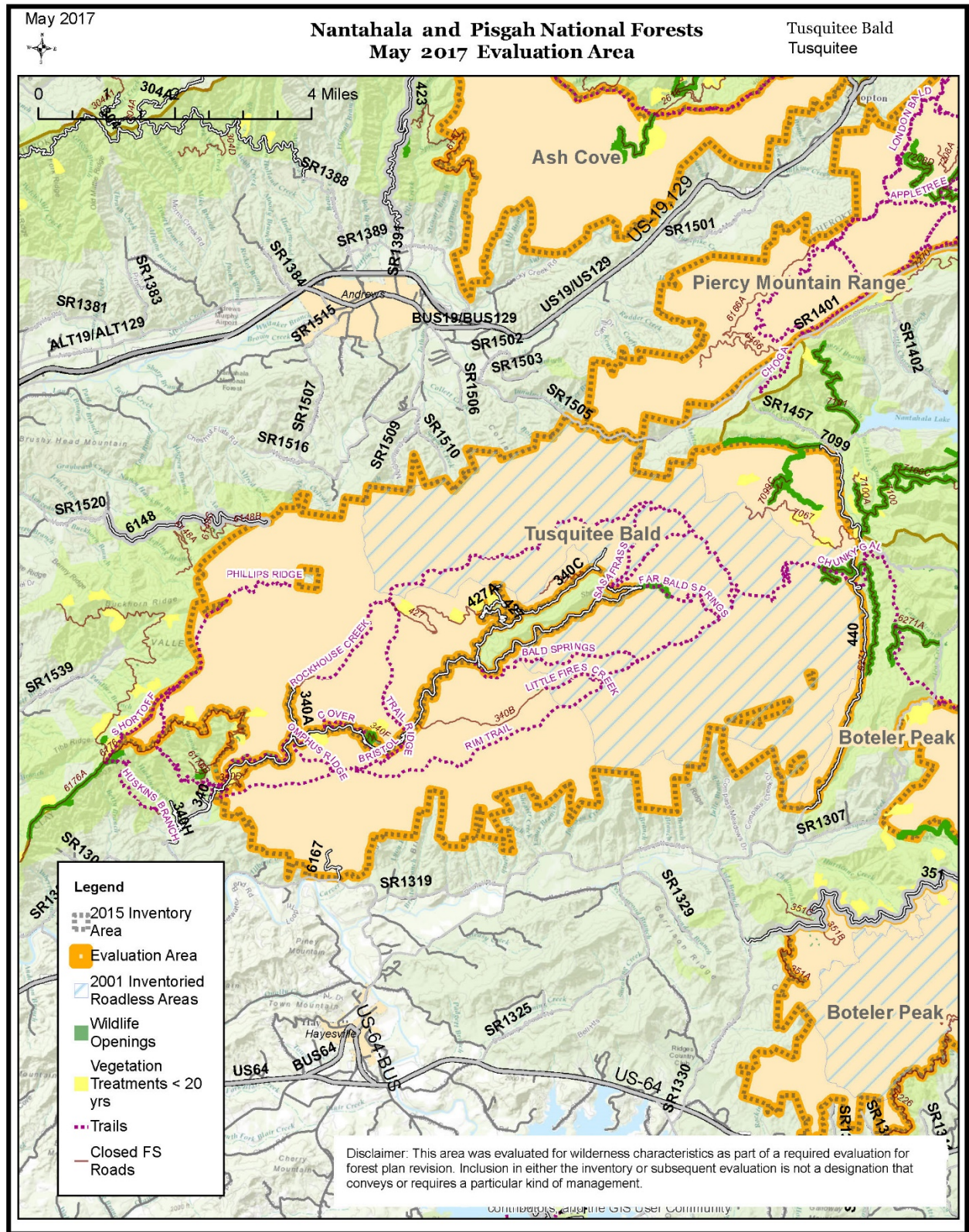
Apparent Naturalness	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Maintenance Level 1 National Forest System Roads:	miles	3.3
Closed Maintenance Level 2 National Forest System Roads:	miles	11.7
Road Stream Crossings, Bridge:	number	1
Road Stream Crossings, Other:	number	32
Trail Stream Crossings, Bridge:	number	0
Vegetation Management, 0-20 years old:	acres	281.2
Vegetation Management, 21-40 years old:	acres	769.4
Maintained Wildlife Fields (may overlap Bald Management Area):	acres	26.6
Existing Wilderness Study Area (WSA):	acres	0
Existing Inventoried Roadless Area (IRA may overlap WSA):	acres	13,645.8

Solitude or Primitive & Unconfined Recreation	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Current Backcountry Management Area (may overlap WSA & IRA):	acres	9,328.3
Inventoried Primitive Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) Setting:	acres	0
Inventoried Semi-Primitive Non-Motorized ROS Setting:	acres	13,879.1

	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Solitude or Primitive & Unconfined Recreation		
Inventoried Semi-Primitive Motorized ROS Setting (buffer of adjacent roads):	acres	3,586.7
Inventoried Roded Natural ROS Setting (buffer of adjacent roads):	acres	11,682.4
National Forest System Trail, Hike-only Allowed Use:	miles	10.4
National Forest System Trail, Hike-Bike Allowed Use:	miles	0
National Forest System Trail, Hike-Horse Allowed Use:	miles	31.8
National Forest System Trail, Hike-Bike-Horse Allowed Use:	miles	0

	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Unique & Outstanding Features		
Current Special Interest Management Area (scenic, geologic, botanical, zoological):	acres	0
Current Designated Wild & Scenic River Corridor (1/4 mile each side):	acres	0
Current Eligible Wild & Scenic River Corridor (1/4 mile each side):	acres	0
Research Natural Area:	acres	0

	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Size & Manageability		
Area, Total:	acres	29,156.1
Private/Non-Federal Inholdings, Total:	acres	167.5
Private/Non-Federal Inholdings, Count:	number	6
Outstanding or Reserved Subsurface Mineral Rights:	acres	646.9
Current Bald Management Area:	acres	0
Forest Research Plots, Count:	number	4



Name: Unicoi Mountains/Upper Bald River

Acres: 8,952 acres

Description of Area

Location & Access

The Unicoi Mountains area lies along the North Carolina and Tennessee state line northwest of Murphy NC, and is in Cherokee County on the Tusquitee Ranger District of the Nantahala National Forest. It is east of National Forest System (NFS) Road 50, northeast of State Road (SR) 1325, and west of Jenks Knob. Access is from these roads and NFS Roads 408 and 80, the Benton MacKaye Trail, and from the Cherokee National Forest Upper Bald River area.

Surroundings

The area is bordered by private lands to the south and east, and NFS lands to the west and north. On the Cherokee NF to the north is the Upper Bald River Wilderness Study Area, which is recommended for wilderness designation. Private lands to the south and east are primarily forested with scattered rural residences and pasture lands. Some of the forested areas appear to have been logged.

Topography & Vegetation

The area is dominated by the Unicoi Mountains ridge along the state line. Parts of the area are steep with elevations ranging from 4,000 feet at Rocky Top, to 1,840 feet near Beaverdam Creek. Much of the area has been logged in the past. The primary ecozones within the area include dry-mesic oak, mesic oak, and acidic cove.

Current Uses

The area is currently managed for wildlife, timber, dispersed recreation, and scenery. Approximately 17 acres of timber have been harvested in the last 20 years and there are about two acres of maintained wildlife fields. The Benton MacKaye Trail traverses the entire ridge along the area's northern boundary, and the area is popular with hikers, backpackers, and hunters.

Evaluation of Wilderness Characteristics

Apparent Naturalness

Although over 1,200 acres have been harvested from the area in the last 40 years, much of it is recovering and has regenerated to a natural appearing condition, particularly on the steeper slopes and higher elevations. There is a large designated old growth patch along the state line, which is adjacent to the Cherokee NF. There are recent timber harvests in the eastern portion of the area and off of NFSR408A, which are a departure from natural conditions in their immediate vicinity. There are approximately 6.6 miles of closed low maintenance level NFS roads in the area, some of which have culverts. Most of the timber harvest and road building affecting apparent naturalness are at lower elevations near the southern and eastern boundaries. There are no structures or highly developed trails in the area.

Opportunities for Solitude or Primitive & Unconfined Recreation

The Unicoi Mountains area provides many opportunities for solitude with rugged terrain and rich forests where the sights and sounds of development are absent, particularly along the northern boundary which is shared with the Upper Bald River Wilderness Study Area on the Cherokee NF. In some areas on the

west, south, and eastern periphery, and adjacent to open roads, the sights and sounds from roads and development have the potential to diminish opportunities for solitude; however, these impacts are not pervasive across the area as a whole.

The Benton MacKaye Trail is a long-distance hiking trail running along the high ridge, and other forms of primitive recreation in the area include hunting, fishing, and backpacking. None of the area receives heavy recreation use; therefore, encounters with other forest visitors is unlikely. Low maintenance level NFS roads may have some equestrian or mountain bike use.

Other Values - Unique or Outstanding Qualities

NFSR 50 is an open road along the western boundary that leads to Sandy Gap and separates the Unicoi Mountains Area from the adjacent Cantrell Top area. Although outside the area, this road generally follows the Trail of Tears route across the Unicoi Mountains to Tennessee. There is over 2,800 acres of designated old growth in this area and two State Natural Heritage Areas.

Size & Manageability

At over 8,900 acres, the Unicoi Mountains area is large enough to be managed as wilderness. Being adjacent to the Upper Bald River Wilderness Study Area on the Cherokee NF, which has been recommended for wilderness designation, makes this area even better suited to be managed as wilderness. However, the southern, western, and eastern boundaries are irregular with several narrow private tracts into the area, which could impact opportunities for solitude with future development.

Summary

The Unicoi Mountains area has natural appearing conditions, to a greater degree at higher elevations. There are opportunities for solitude and primitive recreation opportunities along the higher elevations of the northern boundary which is adjacent to the Cherokee NF's Upper Bald River Wilderness Study Area. The boundary configuration along the west, south, and east are not as conducive to wilderness management, and private lands and adjacent open roads impact solitude in these areas.

Quantitative Summary of Items/Activities within the Unicoi Mountains/Upper Bald River Evaluation Area

Disclaimer: Information was generated from FS spatial datasets. All figures are approximate.

Description of Area	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Spruce-Fir Ecozone:	acres	0
Northern Hardwood Ecozone:	acres	2.2
High Elevation Red Oak Ecozone:	acres	1.4
Acidic Cove Ecozone:	acres	1,018.7
Rich Cove Ecozone:	acres	651.6
Mesic Oak Ecozone:	acres	1,693.9
Dry-Mesic Oak Ecozone:	acres	3,113.4
Dry Oak Ecozone:	acres	582.3
Pine-Oak/Heath Ecozone:	acres	916.4
Shortleaf Pine Ecozone:	acres	961.8
Alluvial Forest Ecozone:	acres	0

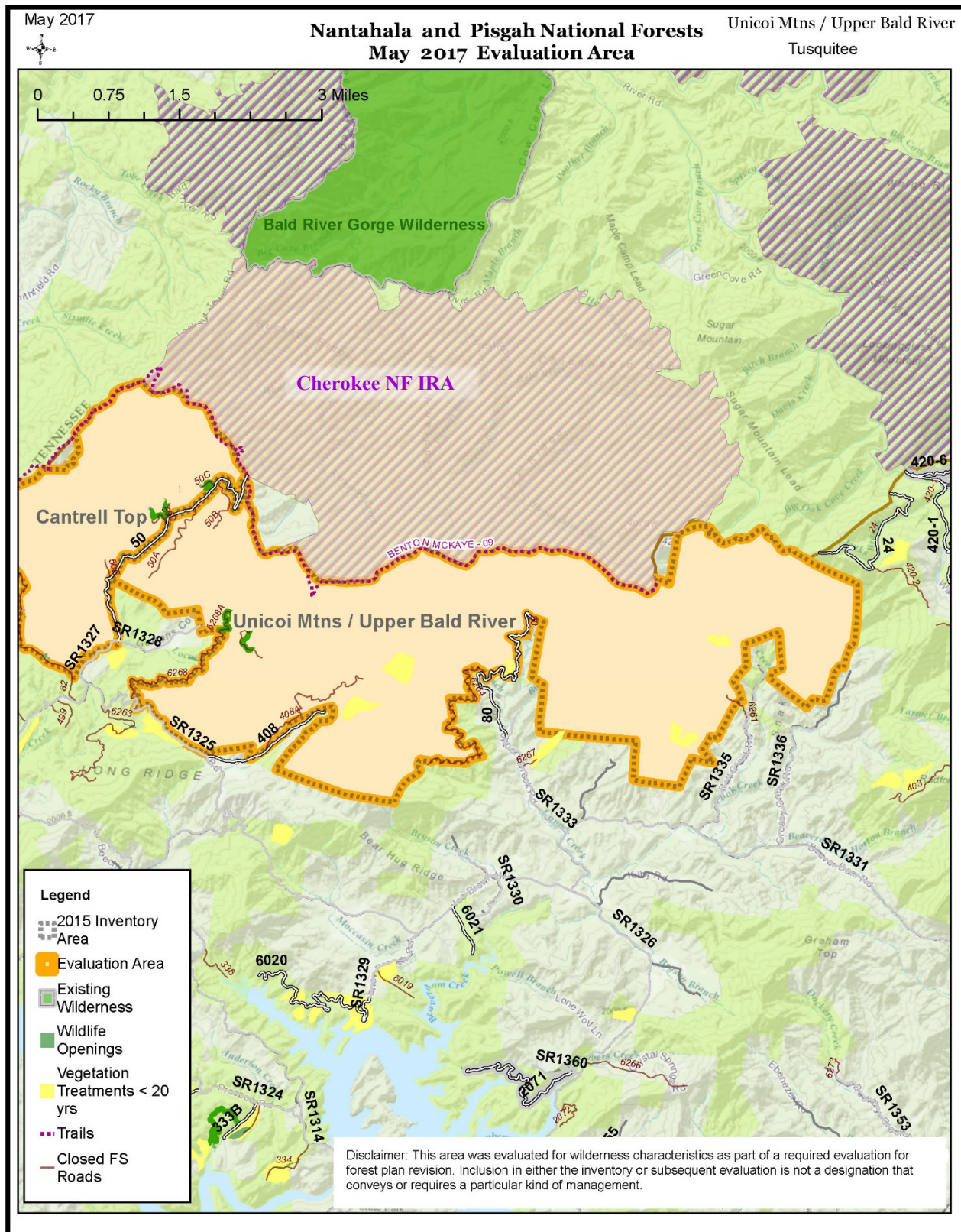
Apparent Naturalness	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Maintenance Level 1 National Forest System Roads:	miles	5.1
Closed Maintenance Level 2 National Forest System Roads:	miles	1.5
Road Stream Crossings, Bridge:	number	0
Road Stream Crossings, Other:	number	7
Trail Stream Crossings, Bridge:	number	0
Vegetation Management, 0-20 years old:	acres	16.9
Vegetation Management, 21-40 years old:	acres	1,241.8
Maintained Wildlife Fields (may overlap Bald Management Area):	acres	2.1
Existing Wilderness Study Area (WSA):	acres	0
Existing Inventoried Roadless Area (IRA may overlap WSA):	acres	0

Solitude or Primitive & Unconfined Recreation	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Current Backcountry Management Area (may overlap WSA & IRA):	acres	0
Inventoried Primitive Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) Setting:	acres	0

	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Solitude or Primitive & Unconfined Recreation		
Inventoried Semi-Primitive Non-Motorized ROS Setting:	acres	3,181.5
Inventoried Semi-Primitive Motorized ROS Setting (buffer of adjacent roads):	acres	1,581.4
Inventoried Roaded Natural ROS Setting (buffer of adjacent roads):	acres	4,185.4
National Forest System Trail, Hike-only Allowed Use:	miles	3.3
National Forest System Trail, Hike-Bike Allowed Use:	miles	0
National Forest System Trail, Hike-Horse Allowed Use:	miles	0
National Forest System Trail, Hike-Bike-Horse Allowed Use:	miles	0

	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Unique & Outstanding Features		
Current Special Interest Management Area (scenic, geologic, botanical, zoological):	acres	0
Current Designated Wild & Scenic River Corridor (1/4 mile each side):	acres	0
Current Eligible Wild & Scenic River Corridor (1/4 mile each side):	acres	0
Research Natural Area:	acres	0

	Acres, miles, or number	Number
Size & Manageability		
Area, Total:	acres	8,952.1
Private/Non-Federal Inholdings, Total:	acres	0
Private/Non-Federal Inholdings, Count:	number	0
Outstanding or Reserved Subsurface Mineral Rights:	acres	0
Current Bald Management Area:	acres	0
Forest Research Plots, Count:	number	3



Step 3: Analysis of Areas Inventoried and Evaluated for Potential Additions to Wilderness in the Nantahala and Pisgah NFs

Building on information from the inventory, and evaluation steps, and input from public participation, some areas were identified as recommended wilderness in one or more alternatives in the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). This analysis explains each alternative as it relates to the wilderness resource, and identifies specific areas from the evaluation, or portions of areas, that will be brought forward for detailed consideration. This analysis also details the reasons that some areas have been excluded from detailed analysis in any alternative.

The Nantahala and Pisgah NFs draft forest plan and draft EIS were released for public comment and review in February 2020. The number of areas and acres of recommended wilderness varied by alternative with Alternative B having the most recommended wilderness at 126,333 acres, Alternative C having the least recommended wilderness at 11,120 acres, and Alternative D having a moderate amount of recommended wilderness at 74,173 acres. The draft EIS did not include a preferred alternative. The Forest received many comments on the draft plan and draft EIS regarding the acreage, characteristics of specific areas, and management of recommended wilderness. Many of these comments were incorporated into the final EIS and the development of the alternative added between draft and final, Alternative E.

The effects that may result from recommending the package of areas in each alternative is described in the Environmental Impact Statement, in the Chapter 3 wilderness section.

Analysis of Recommended Wilderness and Wilderness Study Areas

Summary of Alternatives

Alternative A: 15,226 Acres of Recommended Wilderness

This is the “No-Action” alternative where wilderness recommendations and management direction would continue under the 1986 Nantahala and Pisgah National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan as amended in 1994. This alternative includes five congressionally designated Wilderness Study Areas (WSA) totaling 26,816 acres: Craggy Mountain, Harper Creek, Lost Cove, Overflow and Snowbird. All five areas would be managed to preserve wilderness characteristics until designated or released from further study by Congress. As in the current Plan, three of these WSAs would continue to be recommended for wilderness designation in this alternative, with boundaries and acreages identified in the 1984 legislation:

- Craggy Mountain (WSA) - 2,380 acres
- Harper Creek (WSA) - 7,138
- Lost Cove (WSA) - 5,708 acres

Alternative B: 126,333 Acres of Recommended Wilderness

Theme for the wilderness resource: To be responsive to those individuals and groups who support the largest amount of NFS lands to be preserved as designated wilderness. This alternative recommends the greatest number of evaluation areas and greatest overall acreage for wilderness designation. This alternative includes areas evaluated as having varying degrees of wilderness characteristics and strong support for wilderness recommendation from wilderness advocates. Other areas which received public support for wilderness recommendation but lacked elements of wilderness characteristics are identified for other management areas under this alternative. Another aspect of this alternative is that it

recommends lands adjacent to some WSAs when those lands were found to have a moderate degree of wilderness characteristics.

In Alternative B, the following evaluation areas are recommended for wilderness designation in their entirety:

- Bald Mountains – 11,794
- Joyce Kilmer-Slickrock Wilderness Extension (#2), Deep Creek-Avey Creek – 2,355 acres
- Joyce Kilmer-Slickrock Wilderness Extension (#4), Sugar Cove Branch* – 326 acres
- Linville Gorge Addition, Linville Gorge Wilderness Extension– 2,920 acres
- Lost Cove (WSA) – 5,706 acres
- Southern Nantahala Wilderness Extension, Cherry Cove – 1,157 acres

A portion of the following evaluation areas are recommended for wilderness designation under this alternative. These recommended areas are smaller than the original evaluation area because the entire evaluation area was not found to have wilderness characteristics. Rationale for the adjusted boundaries are explained in the individual area analyses that follow.

- Black Mountains – 11,976 acres
- Cantrell Top - 3,235 acres
- Craggy Mountain (WSA & portion of adjacent evaluation area) – 8,715 acres
- Ellicott Rock Wilderness Extension - 570 acres
- Harper Creek (WSA) – 7,044 acres
- Mackey Mountain – 13,509 acres
- Middle Prong Wilderness Extension – 1,871 acres
- Overflow Creek (WSA & portion of adjacent evaluation area) – 3,725 acres
- Shining Rock Wilderness Extension, Dark Prong (Graveyard Ridge)* – 929 acres
- Shining Rock Wilderness Extension, Sam Branch (Sam Knob)* – 744 acres
- Snowbird (WSA) – 8,481 acres
- Southern Nantahala Wilderness Extension, East (formerly Barker's Creek) - 1,220 acres
- Southern Nantahala Wilderness Extension, West (formerly Chunky Gal) – 6,231 acres
- Southern Nantahala Wilderness Extension, Central (formerly Indian Ridge & Trail Ridge) – 2,092 ac
- Tusquitee Bald – 19,230 acres
- Unicoi Mountains / Upper Bald River – 8,413 acres
- Wesser Bald – 4,093 acres

Alternative C: 11,120 Acres of Recommended Wilderness

Theme for the wilderness resource: To be responsive to those who are generally opposed to additional designated wilderness; and who may favor additional semi-primitive non-motorized recreation opportunities without the restrictions of designated wilderness; or those wanting expanded opportunities for active management to restore forest health, provide for wildlife habitat needs, and to increase the volume and availability of timber products. This alternative includes the least amount of recommended wilderness compared to the other alternatives, but has the most acres

* Due to changes in boundary configuration for this recommended area, the geographic feature for which the original inventory and evaluation area was named is no longer relevant. This new recommended area name will be referenced in this analysis, Environmental Impact Statement, and Land Management Plan to be consistent with notable geographic features within revised area boundaries.

proposed for backcountry management, with many of the inventory and evaluation areas designated as Backcountry MA. It is responsive to public comments opposing additional wilderness, and also seeks to address those publics who desire to preserve large blocks of un-roaded lands for semi-primitive non-motorized recreation without additional restrictions on mechanized transport (mountain bikes, etc.), group size, or permitting of commercial recreation special-use events. This alternative also allows for more areas that were inventoried and evaluated for potential additions to wilderness to be managed for forest restoration, timber products, wildlife habitat improvement, or gathering of non-timber forest products for commercial purposes. Two congressionally designated Wilderness Study Areas evaluated as having high quality wilderness characteristics would be recommended for wilderness designation in Alternative C:

- Craggy Mountain (WSA) – 2,639 acres
- Snowbird (WSA) – 8,481 acres

Of the three remaining WSAs, Harper Creek and Lost Cove are not recommended in this alternative as a response to public comments seeking future potential for mechanized recreation opportunities (i.e. mountain biking) in these areas; and Overflow WSA is not recommended because it was evaluated as having a low degree of wilderness characteristics.

Alternative D: 74,173 Acres of Recommended Wilderness

Theme for the wilderness resource: To strike a balance between the various public's interests to actively manage and restore the forest for resiliency and biological diversity, to provide for semi-primitive non-motorized recreation settings without restrictions of wilderness designation, and to preserve as recommended wilderness those areas which possess the highest degree of undeveloped and natural characteristics, opportunities for solitude or primitive and unconfined recreation, or other features of value. Many of the recommended areas in Alternative D are extensions to existing designated wilderness, which would enhance wilderness values by increasing opportunities for solitude, improving manageability, and/or preserving wilderness characteristics where they exist on NFS lands adjacent to designated wilderness. This alternative also seeks to minimize inclusion of existing non-conforming uses within recommended areas, where sustaining these existing uses would be inconsistent with wilderness values. Examples of these existing non-conforming uses include NFS roads and/or fields maintained as wildlife openings, trails of a more highly developed classification where mechanized transport is a managed use, or areas of active management where repetitive entries would be necessary to achieve silvicultural objectives and long-term forest health and resiliency. Although recommendation of wilderness allows for areas to be recommended where ongoing activities would have to be mitigated to be consistent with wilderness management, Alternative D sought to continue ongoing multiple uses in those locations, and so does not recommend those areas or portions of areas for wilderness. Many recommended area boundaries were also delineated to exclude inholdings or narrow "fingers" of NFS lands which could affect opportunities for unconfined recreation or manageability as wilderness.

The 74,173 acres recommended for wilderness under Alternative D were identified to achieve a balance with regard to their degree of wilderness characteristics, manageability to preserve those characteristics, public desires, and other multiple-use considerations. Alternative D recommends nine areas as extensions to the existing Southern Nantahala, Joyce Kilmer-Slickrock, Middle Prong, and Shining Rock Wildernesses. Four of the five existing Wilderness Study Areas are recommended for designation, including Lost Cove, Harper Creek, Snowbird, and Craggy WSAs; the latter of which also has a recommended extension. Mackey Mountain, Black Mountains, and Tusquitee Bald evaluation areas are recommended as new stand-alone wildernesses, each is in excess of 5,000 acres.

In Alternative D, the following evaluation areas are recommended for wilderness designation in their entirety:

- Joyce Kilmer-Slickrock Wilderness Extension (#2), Deep Creek-Avey Creek – 2,355 acres
- Joyce Kilmer-Slickrock Wilderness Extension (#3), Yellowhammer Branch – 1,272 acres
- Joyce Kilmer-Slickrock Wilderness Extension (#4), Sugar Cove Branch* – 326 acres

A portion of the following evaluation areas are recommended for wilderness designation under this alternative, i.e. the recommended area is smaller than the original evaluation area:

- Black Mountains – 11,976 acres
- Craggy Mountain (WSA & portion of adjacent evaluation area) – 3,481 acres
- Harper Creek (WSA) – 7,042 acres
- Lost Cove (WSA) – 5,706 acres
- Mackey Mountain – 7,872 acres
- Middle Prong Wilderness Extension – 1,871 acres
- Shining Rock Wilderness Extension, Dark Prong (Graveyard Ridge)* – 929 acres
- Shining Rock Wilderness Extension, Sam Branch (Sam Knob)* – 744 acres
- Snowbird (WSA) – 8,481 acres
- Southern Nantahala Wilderness Extension, East (formerly Barker's Creek) – 1,000 acres
- Southern Nantahala Wilderness Extension, West (formerly Chunky Gal) – 3,510 acres
- Southern Nantahala Wilderness Extension, Central (formerly Indian Ridge & Trail Ridge) – 1,660 ac
- Tusquitee Bald – 15,984 acres

Alternative E (Preferred Alternative): 49,098 acres

Alternative E is the preferred alternative, was developed after consideration of public comments on the Draft Plan and EIS and is therefore only analyzed in the Final EIS. Alternative E recommends fourteen areas for wilderness designation, eight of which are extensions to existing designated wildernesses, and six of which are stand-alone areas (four Wilderness Study Areas).

These recommended wilderness areas were derived from the original wilderness inventory polygons identified in the first step of the wilderness evaluation process, but in most cases have revised boundaries and acreage. Areas were determined based on consideration of the information in the wilderness evaluation and analysis, which indicated these areas have high wilderness characteristics such as naturalness, undeveloped, outstanding opportunities for solitude or a primitive and unconfined recreation, or other special features such as ecological, geological, or scientific, educational, scenic or historical values.

Public comments helped to inform the recommendations in Alternative E, but there continues to be a wide spectrum of opinions regarding the amount of designated wilderness on the Nantahala and Pisgah NFs.

* Due to changes in boundary configuration for this recommended area, the geographic feature for which the original inventory and evaluation area was named is no longer relevant. This new recommended area name will be referenced in this analysis, Environmental Impact Statement, and Land Management Plan to be consistent with notable geographic features within revised area boundaries.

The selection of the 49,098 acres for recommended wilderness under Alternative E was carefully considered in the context of public support, the characteristics of each area, each area's contribution to the forest's wilderness recommendation, and tradeoffs between managing the areas as recommended wilderness and managing them as other land allocations.

- Bald Mountains – 6,319 acres
- Craggy Mountain (WSA & portion of adjacent evaluation area) – 3,222 acres
- Harper Creek (WSA minus road buffers) – 7,044 acres
- Joyce Kilmer-Slickrock Wilderness Extension (#2), Deep Creek-Avey Creek – 1,912 acres
- Joyce Kilmer-Slickrock Wilderness Extension (#4), Sugar Cove Branch† – 326 acres
- Lost Cove (WSA minus road buffers) – 5,681 acres
- Mackey Mountain – 7,872 acres
- Shining Rock Wilderness Extension, Dark Prong (Graveyard Ridge)* – 939 acres
- Shining Rock Wilderness Extension, Sam Branch (Sam Knob)* – 688 acres
- Snowbird (WSA minus road buffers) – 8,335 acres
- Southern Nantahala Wilderness Extension, East (formerly Barker's Creek) - 998 acres
- Southern Nantahala Wilderness Extension, West (formerly Chunky Gal)– 2,055 acres
- Southern Nantahala Wilderness Extension, Central (formerly Indian Ridge & Trail Ridge) – 1,052 ac
- Unicoi Mountains (extension to Upper Bald River Wilderness on Cherokee NF) – 2,655 acres

Additional Information Relevant to All Alternatives

Under each alternative, all five congressionally designated WSAs would be managed to preserve wilderness characteristics until designated as wilderness or released from further study by congress, regardless of recommendation or non-recommendation for wilderness designation.

The effects of recommending these or other evaluation areas for wilderness designation are analyzed in Chapter 3 of the DEIS. Additional detail for each area identified in this analysis can be found in the preceding section of this appendix titled, "Evaluation of Areas that may be Suitable for Inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System".

Acreage of Wilderness Study Areas, Inventoried Roadless Areas, recommended areas, and other inventory and evaluation areas are derived from GIS. Inherently, editing GIS data results in variations which may create deviations in calculated acres. Therefore, acres shown in this analysis, and previously released inventory and evaluation documents may indicate a slightly different size for any given area. These variations may also be a result of refinements in mapping, application of a consistent buffer around roads or developed features, or corrections to previously mapped areas. If congress designates any recommended area, wilderness boundaries and acreages would be refined based on features and topography, and a legal boundary description would be published in the Federal Register.

† Due to changes in boundary configuration for this recommended area, the geographic feature for which the original inventory and evaluation area was named is no longer relevant. This new recommended area name will be referenced in this analysis, Environmental Impact Statement, and Land Management Plan to be consistent with notable geographic features within revised area boundaries.

Rationale for Evaluation Area Recommendations in Alternatives B, C, D, and E

Bald Mountain

Appalachian Ranger District / Bald Mountains Geographic Area

Acres Evaluated: 11,616

Much of the Bald Mountain area is an Inventoried Roadless Area, but the evaluation included additional acres beyond the IRA boundary. The area is predominately natural appearing, with some opportunities for solitude and primitive and unconfined recreation. The presence of low maintenance level NFS roads, which are maintained as linear wildlife openings, detract from natural and undeveloped characteristics in their immediate vicinity. The Appalachian Trail passes through portions of the area to the north, and receives very heavy use at certain times of year, which could affect solitude. The area contains no NFS trails managed for motorized use or mechanized transport. The Camp Creek Bald fire tower and communication site are adjacent developments which detract from solitude where visible, but those impacts are not pervasive throughout the area. Camp Creek Bald consists of several mowed fields immediately adjacent to the evaluation area, where the sights and sounds of tractors and other vehicles could affect solitude. However, impacts to solitude from other surrounding land uses or uses within the area are negligible.

A portion of the area is adjacent to the Cherokee NF's 11,744 acre Bald Mountain IRA, which is not recommended for wilderness designation in their Forest Plan. To the southwest, much of the adjacent lands in TN are non-IRA National Forest or private lands surrounding Camp Creek Bald and an open road which accesses the bald. If considered as a candidate for potential wilderness designation in conjunction with Cherokee NF's Bald Mountain IRA, Camp Creek Bald and the non-IRA lands surrounding its access road would almost bisect the two areas; creating a significant disconnect between them. The Bald Mountain evaluation area in NC has a long and relatively narrow configuration, which could affect manageability for solitude and unconfined recreation.

Alternative B

Acres Recommended: 11,794

Acres in Wilderness Study Area: None

Acres in Inventoried Roadless Area: 11,075

Miles of NFS roads (ML1 & 2): 5.2

Acres of vegetation management (< 20 years old): None

Acres of maintained wildlife fields: 12.4

Miles of NFS trail managed for bicycle use: None

Acres of non-federal inholdings: None

Acres of outstanding or reserved mineral rights: None

Consistent with the theme of alternative B, this area is recommended because the area possess a moderate degree of wilderness characteristics overall, and has public support for recommendation from wilderness advocates.

Alternative C

Acres Recommended: None

Consistent with the theme of Alternative C, this area is not recommended.

Alternative D

Acres Recommended: None

Consistent with the theme of Alternative D, this area is not recommended because it does not contain a high degree of wilderness characteristics. The Bald Mountain evaluation area contains features which affect naturalness, such as NFS roads and wildlife fields. It has adjacent developments and uses which could affect solitude and has a shape and configuration which could affect manageability for primitive and unconfined recreation.

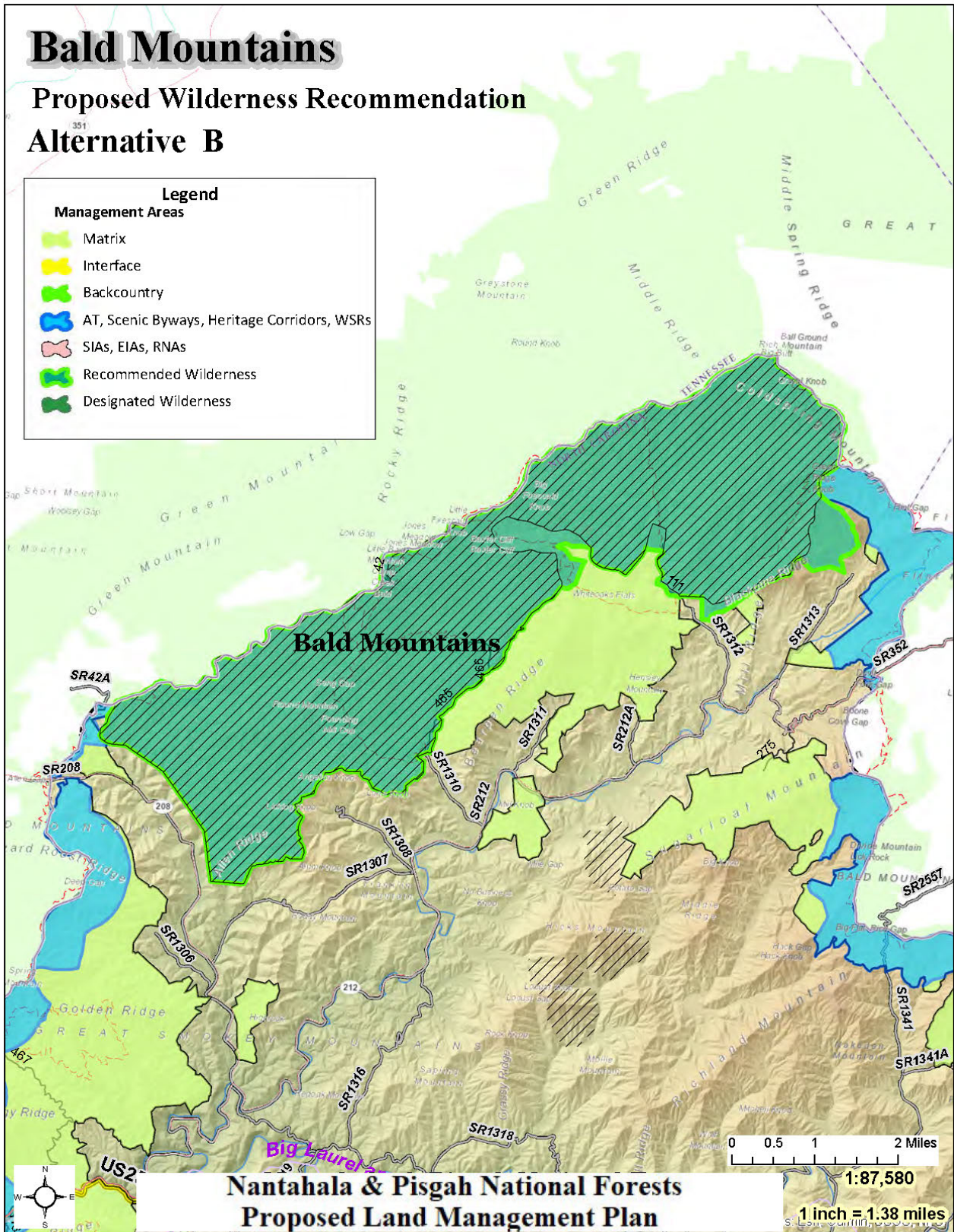
Alternative E (Preferred Alternative)

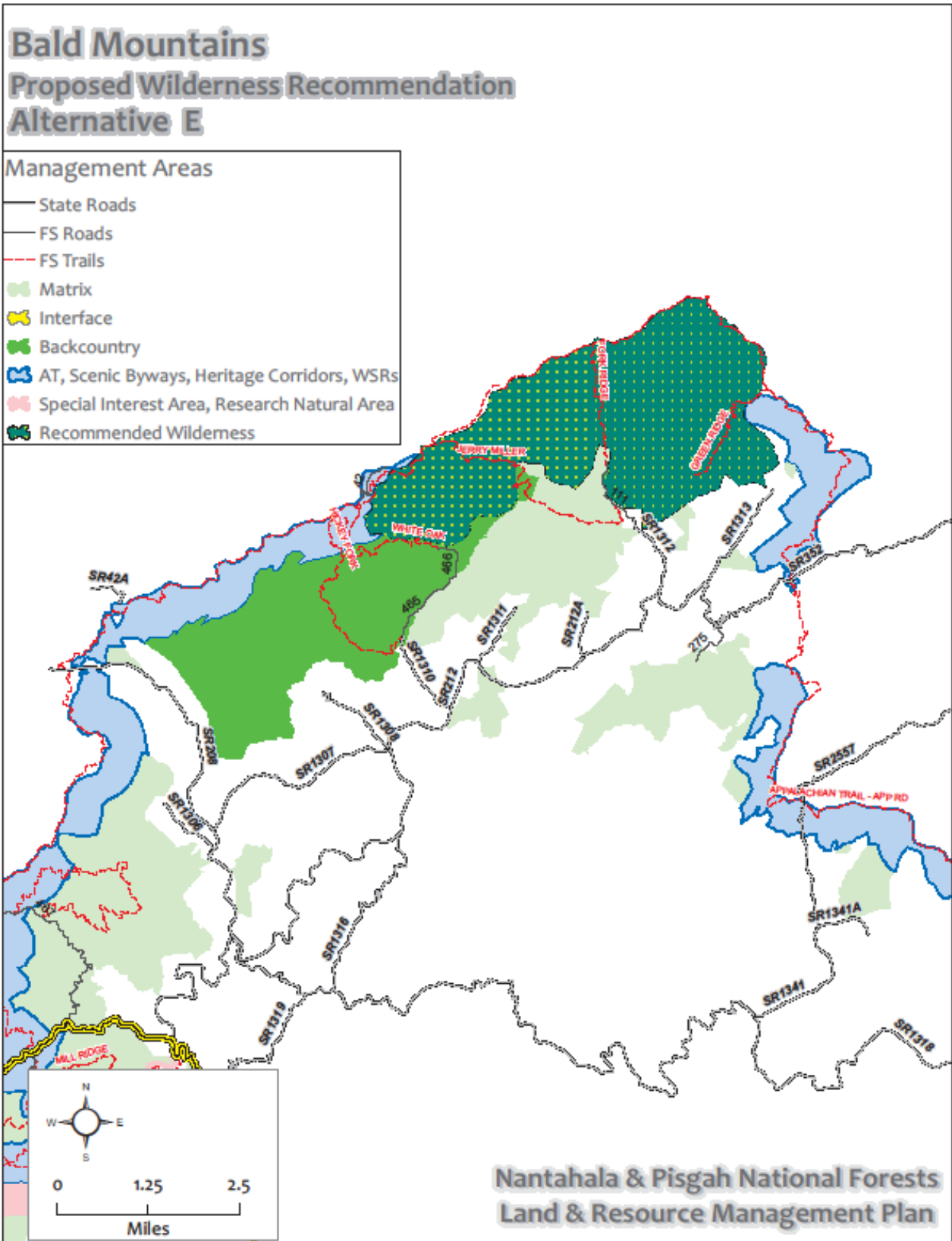
Acres Recommended: 6,319

Acres in Wilderness Study Area: None
Acres in Inventoried Roadless Area: 5,818
Miles of NFS roads (ML1 & 2): 1.0
Acres of vegetation management (< 20 years old): None
Acres of maintained wildlife fields: 1.6
Miles of NFS trail managed for bicycle use: None
Acres of non-federal inholdings: None
Acres of outstanding or reserved mineral rights: None

After additional consideration of this area, Alternative E recommends the northeastern portion of the Bald Mountain evaluation area. This area contains the highest degree of wilderness characteristics and is adjacent to the Bald Mountain Inventoried Roadless Area on the Cherokee NF. The northeastern portion of the evaluation area is largely undeveloped and natural appearing and offers opportunities for solitude and primitive and unconfined recreation. Improvements, such as open roads and portions of Camp Creek Bald fire tower and communication site complex, have been excluded from the area that is being recommended in Alternative E. The Appalachian Trail runs along the border of the area between North Carolina and Tennessee, and as with trails in all recommended wilderness, maintenance along this section of trail could continue to use motorized equipment until the area is congressionally designated as wilderness. Portions of Dry Creek Road and Hickey Fork Road totaling one mile would be considered for decommissioning if no longer being utilized. The portion of Dry Creek Road that is maintained as a linear wildlife opening may continue to be mowed until designation as wilderness.

The portion to the southwest is not recommended for wilderness designation because of a combination of issues that affect wilderness characteristics and other considerations identified in public comments. Some of those reasons are that the long and narrow configuration could make management to preserve wilderness characteristics difficult because of sights and sounds from adjacent private lands and open roads. There are also several acres of wildlife fields/linear wildlife openings that extend deep into the area and a system road, a portion of which is open seasonally. The area is popular with bear hunters and there has been a long-standing interest in opening additional road segments for hunting season. This unique combination of factors contributed to the Forest Supervisor decision not to recommend the southwestern portion of the area.





Black Mountains

Appalachian Ranger District / Black Mountains Geographic Area

Acres Evaluated: 12,473

With most of the Black Mountains area in an Inventoried Roadless Area, botanical special interest area, and Research Natural Area, protections under these designations have allowed it to retain many wilderness characteristics. There are opportunities for solitude across much of the area. However, impacts to solitude may occur where private development is visible in the South Toe River Valley, or the occasional sound of blasting from a nearby quarry, or from the high recreational visitation in peak use seasons. The area has opportunities for primitive and unconfined recreation in many locations, but the area's relatively narrow boundary configuration, steep side-slopes, and central ridge tend to limit recreation use to the ridgeline.

The area contains no NFS trails managed for motorized use or mechanized transport, but does have 1.7 miles of low maintenance level NFS road managed as a linear wildlife opening along the eastern boundary. Developed features exist at Ray Mine where an abandoned mine shaft is blocked by steel grates, and at Bowlen's Creek which has water pipes and a water intake structure for the nearby town of Burnsville. Ray Mine is also a popular area for non-commercial mineral collection. The Black Mountains area does possess outstanding and unique values, such as being part of the highest mountain range in the eastern United States, having one of the best examples of a high elevation spruce-fir forest in the Southern Appalachian Mountains, and being a destination for viewing exceptional scenery. The evaluation area also contains Middle Creek Research Natural Area, where scientific studies are conducted using this rare ecosystem as a control to determine effects from environmental stressors in similar habitats elsewhere.

Alternatives B & D

Acres Recommended: 11,976

Acres in Wilderness Study Area: None

Acres in Inventoried Roadless Area: 10,599

Miles of NFS roads (ML1 & 2): 1.5

Acres of vegetation management (< 20 years old): None

Acres of maintained wildlife fields: 0.6

Miles of NFS trail managed for bicycle use: None

Acres of non-federal inholdings: 2.6

Acres of outstanding or reserved mineral rights: None

This area is recommended for wilderness designation in both Alternatives B and D due to a moderate to high degree of wilderness characteristics and public support for recommendation from wilderness advocates. To exclude developed features, the recommended area boundary was modified in both alternatives to remove the Bowlen's Creek and Ray Mine areas. To improve manageability and opportunities for primitive and unconfined recreation, some narrow fingers of NFS lands were also excluded along the eastern boundary. Under alternatives B and D, commercial recreation special use events would no longer be permitted, nor would commercial collection of non-timber forest products such as galax. Management as recommended or designated wilderness would not conflict with Research Natural Area objectives.

Alternative C

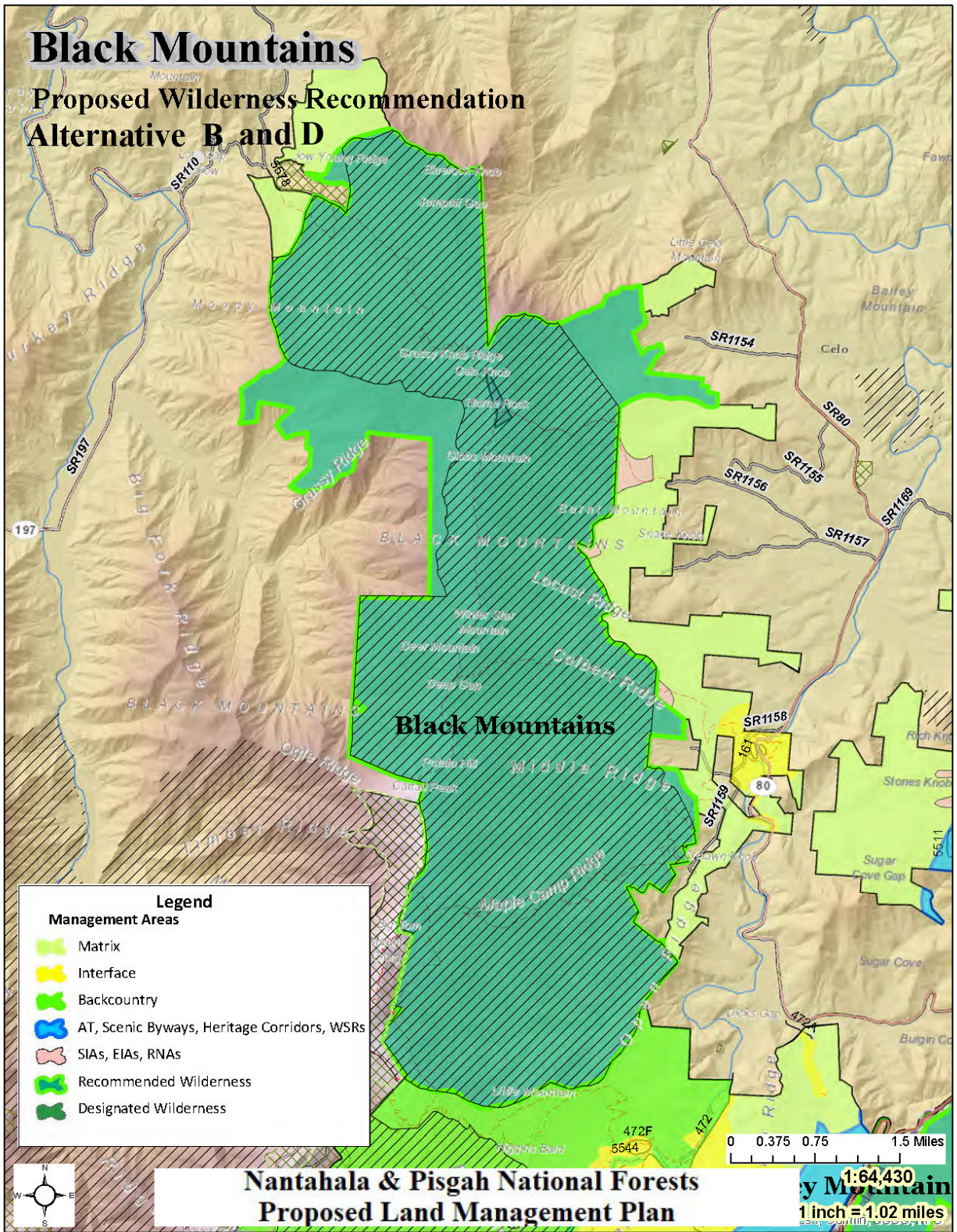
Acres Recommended: None

Consistent with the theme of Alternative C, this area is not recommended.

Alternative E (Preferred Alternative)

Acres Recommended: None

After lengthy discussions on the analysis and wilderness characteristics of the Black Mountains area, and effects that detract from those characteristics, the Forest Supervisor decided not to recommend the area for wilderness designation. Some of the concerns were the convex topography of the area which allows expansive visibility to surrounding private lands and multiple developments. The sights and sounds from adjacent development include residential and agricultural properties, a golf course, an air strip, an open pit gravel quarry, and vehicle noise from the Blue Ridge Parkway. The long, narrow configuration of the area also limits the core acreage where fewer impacts might be expected. Public comments identified concerns with potential loss of opportunity for commercial galax collection permits and discontinuing commercial special use permits for foot races, both of which would have an associated loss of economic benefits to the surrounding communities. This unique combination of factors contributed to the Forest Supervisor decision not to recommend Black Mountains in Alternative E.



Cantrell Top

Tusquitee Ranger District / Hiwassee Geographic Area

Acres Evaluated: 3,664

The Cantrell Top area is predominately natural appearing although there is evidence of past vegetation management at mid-slope, and a maintained wildlife opening. The area contains no NFS trails managed for motorized use or mechanized transport. The area has some opportunities for solitude in its core and along the ridge shared with the Cherokee NF, but adjacent roads could affect solitude to the east.

Although the Cantrell Top area is less than 5,000 acres, it was evaluated because a small portion of the area to the northeast is adjacent to the Cherokee NF's Upper Bald River Wilderness (Congressionally designated in December 2018). The area's boundary configuration to the southwest is not conducive to managing for unconfined recreation due to the long narrow shape, which is only about 0.7 miles wide. The area is also separated from the nearby Unicoi Mountains/Upper Bald River evaluation area by an open road. Overall, the area has limited ability to be managed for preservation of wilderness characteristics in an unimpaired condition.

Alternative B

Acres Recommended: 3,235

Acres in Wilderness Study Area: None

Acres in Inventoried Roadless Area: None

Miles of NFS roads (ML1 & 2): None

Acres of vegetation management (< 20 years old): None

Acres of maintained wildlife fields: 1.4

Miles of NFS trail managed for bicycle use: None

Acres of non-federal inholdings: None

Acres of outstanding or reserved mineral rights: None

A portion of the inventory area was included in Alternative B because the area contains some wilderness characteristics, and has public support for recommendation from some wilderness advocacy groups. The recommended area boundary in this alternative was driven by public comment.

Alternative C

Acres Recommended: None

Consistent with the theme of Alternative C, this area is not recommended.

Alternative D

Acres Recommended: None

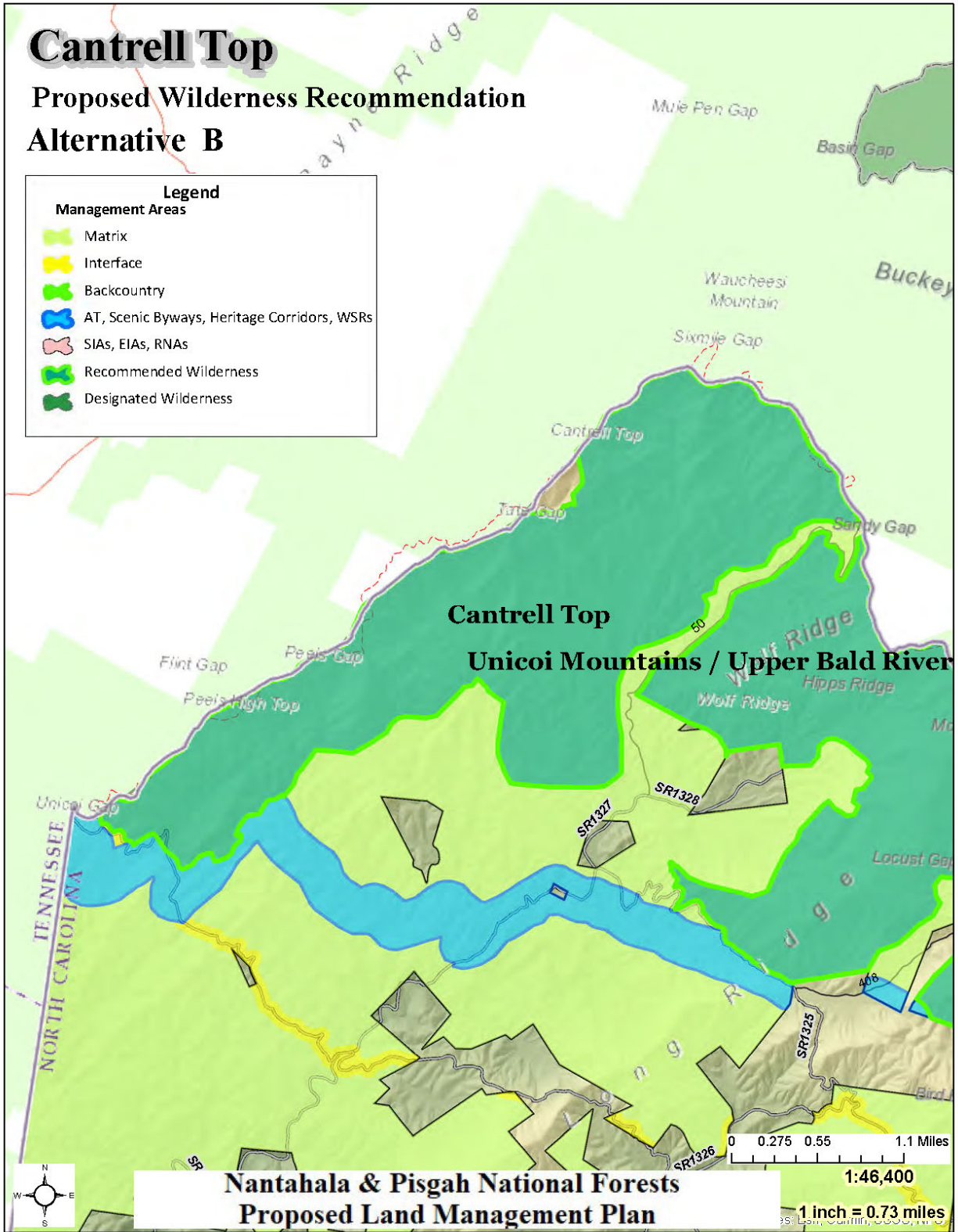
Consistent with the theme of Alternative D, this area was not recommended because it does not contain a high degree of wilderness characteristics compared to other recommended areas in this alternative. The Cantrell Top evaluation area contains features which affect naturalness, has adjacent roads which affect solitude, and has a configuration which could affect manageability for primitive and unconfined recreation.

Alternative E (Preferred Alternative)

Acres Recommended: None

Consistent with the discussion in Alternative D, and after consideration of analysis and public comments, this area is not recommended in Alternative E. Although portions of the Cantrell Top area do have wilderness characteristics, there are many factors which detract from those characteristics or their

manageability. The area has a long narrow configuration, which is only 0.5 miles wide to the southwest. Along its shared boundary with the Cherokee NF to the northwest, there are private inholdings and management of the adjacent national forest is focused on restoration of ecological communities. Only a small portion of the area is adjacent to the Upper Bald River Wilderness on the CNF. To the southeast, the area is flanked by roads. This unique combination of factors contributed to the Forest Supervisor decision not to recommend this area.



Craggy Mountain

Appalachian Ranger District / Black Mountain Geographic Area

Acres Evaluated: 10,653

The Craggy Mountain area, also known as “Big Ivy, lies adjacent to the Blue Ridge Parkway northeast of Asheville, NC. The lands east and south of the evaluation area are contiguous with the Big Tom Wilson Preserve (private), Mount Mitchell State Park, Blue Ridge Parkway (National Park Service), and Asheville Municipal Watershed; the latter of which is separated from the Craggy Mountain area by the Blue Ridge Parkway. While these adjacent or nearby areas offer some level of protection from development, they do allow varying amounts of motorized use which could affect opportunities for solitude.

The southern quarter of Craggy Mountain evaluation area is a WSA recommended for wilderness designation in the 1994 LRMP; which is also overlapped by an IRA. This portion of the evaluation area has been maintained to preserve wilderness characteristics since designated as a WSA in 1975 and expanded in 1984. As a result, this portion of the area retains high quality natural and undeveloped characteristics. It also has moderate opportunities for solitude and primitive and unconfined recreation, limited to some degree by its small size and proximity to the Blue Ridge Parkway and other open roads. The adjacent Locust Ridge area immediately north of the WSA also possess a similar mix and quality of wilderness characteristics.

The central and northern portions of the evaluation area contain maintained wildlife fields and linear wildlife openings, Trail Class 3 NFS trails with a managed use of bicycling, and several miles of Maintenance Level 1 and 2 NFS roads. This portion of the evaluation area is also bisected by the 8.4 mile Maintenance Level 3 NFS road 74, which is managed as open year-round and extends to the WSA boundary at Douglas Falls trailhead. Wildlife fields, linear wildlife openings, and the more highly developed trails detract from naturalness and undeveloped characteristics. The open NFS road through the center of the area and relatively heavy recreation use in the area affect opportunities for solitude. Mechanized transport on trails managed for bicycle use is inconsistent with the wilderness characteristic of primitive recreation. Area configuration, roads, and highly developed trails suitable for bicycle use also divide the area into smaller parcels which confine primitive recreation opportunities, and negatively affect manageability to preserve wilderness characteristics where they do exist. These features detract from wilderness characteristics, which result in a low to moderate quality of characteristics across most of the central and northern portions of the evaluation area.

Alternative B

Acres Recommended: 8,715

Acres in Wilderness Study Area: 2,575

Acres in Inventoried Roadless Area: 2,650

Miles of NFS roads (ML1 & 2): 2.9

Acres of vegetation management (< 20 years old): None

Acres of maintained wildlife fields: 7.2

Miles of NFS trail managed for bicycle use: None

Acres of non-federal inholdings: None

Acres of outstanding or reserved mineral rights: None

This alternative recommends the majority of the Craggy Mountain evaluation area, but excludes NFS roads 74 and 5548, all NFS trails managed for bicycle use, and some linear wildlife openings and fields. By excluding these detracting features, the recommended area contains a moderate degree of wilderness characteristics. The recommended area boundary in this alternative was driven by public

comment; however, the boundary includes ML2 NFS roads maintained as wildlife openings to the north, which affect naturalness and undeveloped characteristics, and has several adjacent open roads which affect opportunities for solitude. To the east, the recommended area in this alternative has a long narrow arm which connects its northern and southern parts. This “arm” is approximately 3 miles long and is less than 700 feet wide at its narrowest point. This shape and configuration confine opportunities for primitive recreation, and would make management to preserve wilderness characteristics difficult. Recommendation of this area is supported by wilderness advocacy groups, Asheville City Commissioners, Buncombe County Commissioners, local residents, and others who submitted public comments.

Alternative C

Acres Recommended: 2,639

Acres in Wilderness Study Area: 2,575

Acres in Inventoried Roadless Area: 2,616

Miles of NFS roads (ML1 & 2): None

Acres of vegetation management (< 20 years old): None

Acres of maintained wildlife fields: None

Miles of NFS trail managed for bicycle use: None

Acres of non-federal inholdings: None

Acres of outstanding or reserved mineral rights: None

Alternative C recommends the designated WSA for wilderness but does not recommend additional acreage. Despite its relatively small size, the existing WSA has a high degree of wilderness characteristics and is supported by local governments and wilderness advocates for continued management as wilderness.

Alternative D

Acres Recommended: 3,481

Acres in Wilderness Study Area: 2,575

Acres in Inventoried Roadless Area: 2,650

Miles of NFS roads (ML1 & 2): None

Acres of vegetation management (< 20 years old): None

Acres of maintained wildlife fields: None

Miles of NFS trail managed for bicycle use: None

Acres of non-federal inholdings: None

Acres of outstanding or reserved mineral rights: None

Consistent with the theme of Alternative D to recommend areas with a high degree of wilderness characteristics, only the Craggy Mountain WSA/IRA and the adjacent Locust Ridge area is recommended for wilderness designation in alternative D. As described above, this portion of the evaluation area has the highest degree of natural and undeveloped characteristics. Opportunities for solitude and unconfined recreation are affected to some degree by sights and sounds of the adjacent Blue Ridge Parkway, and the relatively small size of the recommended area. However, even with its small size, area boundaries are generally consolidated in such a way to make management of wilderness characteristics in an unimpaired condition possible.

Alternative E (Preferred Alternative)

Acres Recommended: 3,222

Acres in Wilderness Study Area: 2,575

Acres in Inventoried Roadless Area: 2,650

Miles of NFS roads (ML1 & 2): None

Acres of vegetation management (< 20 years old): None

Acres of maintained wildlife fields: None

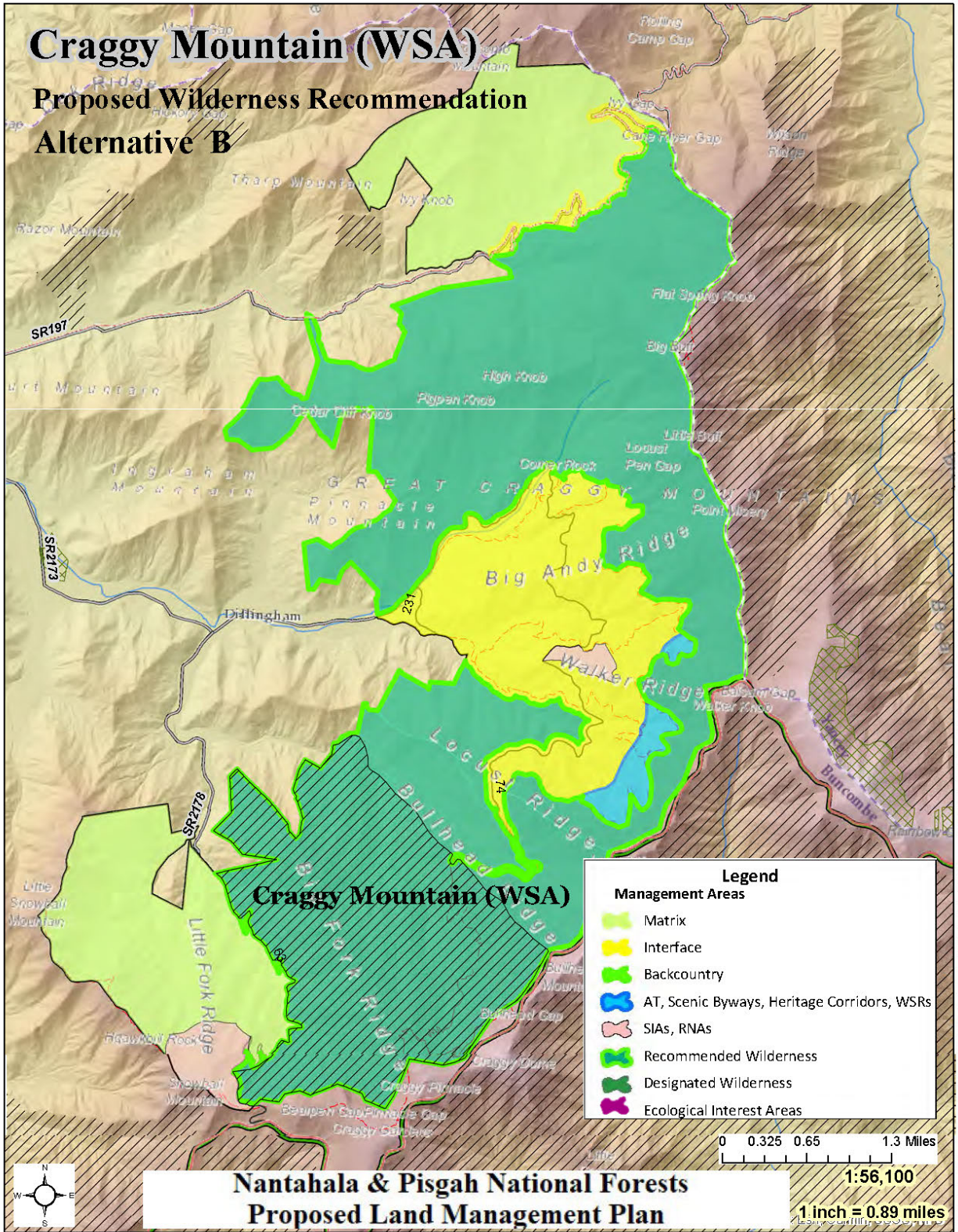
Miles of NFS trail managed for bicycle use: None

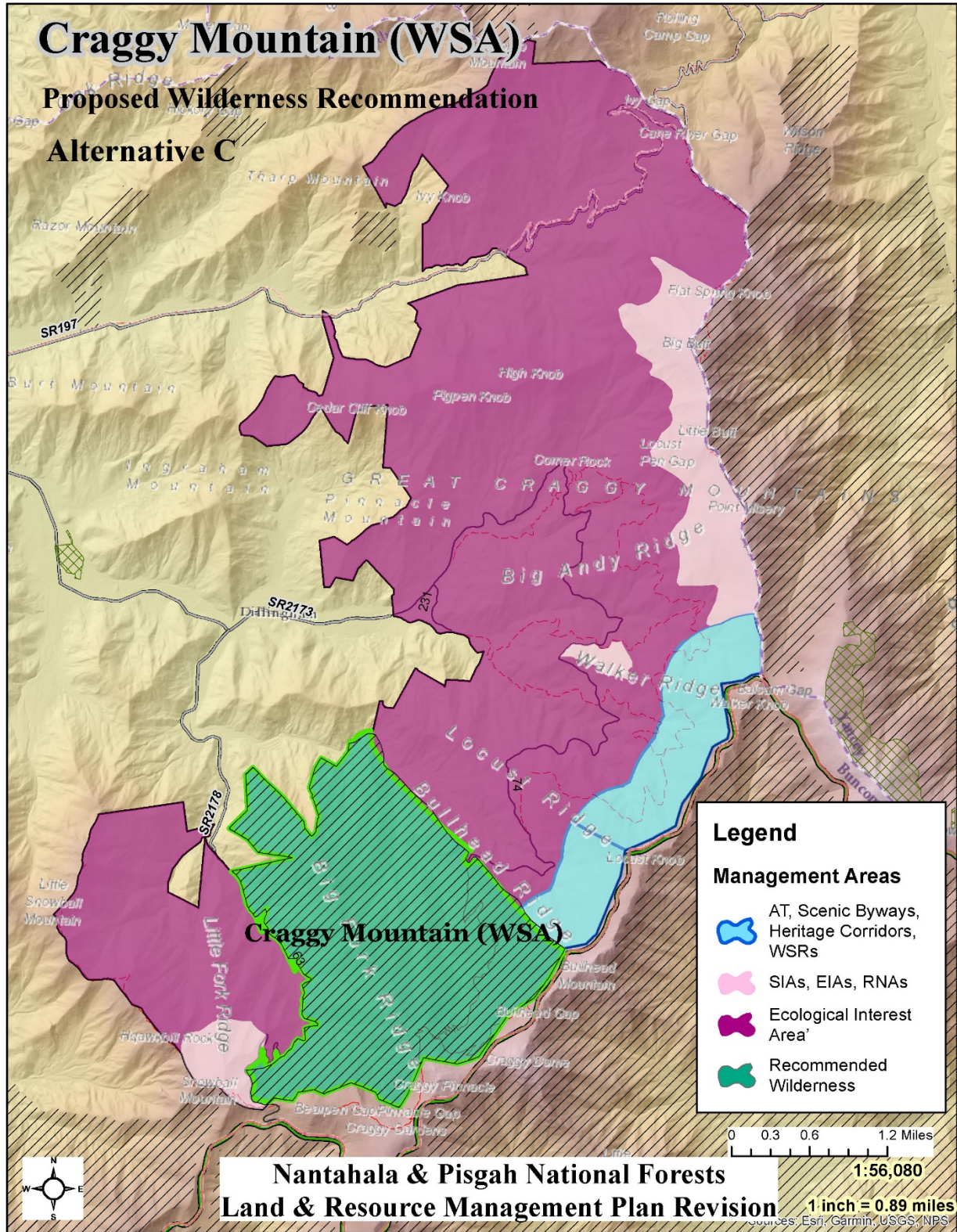
Acres of non-federal inholdings: None

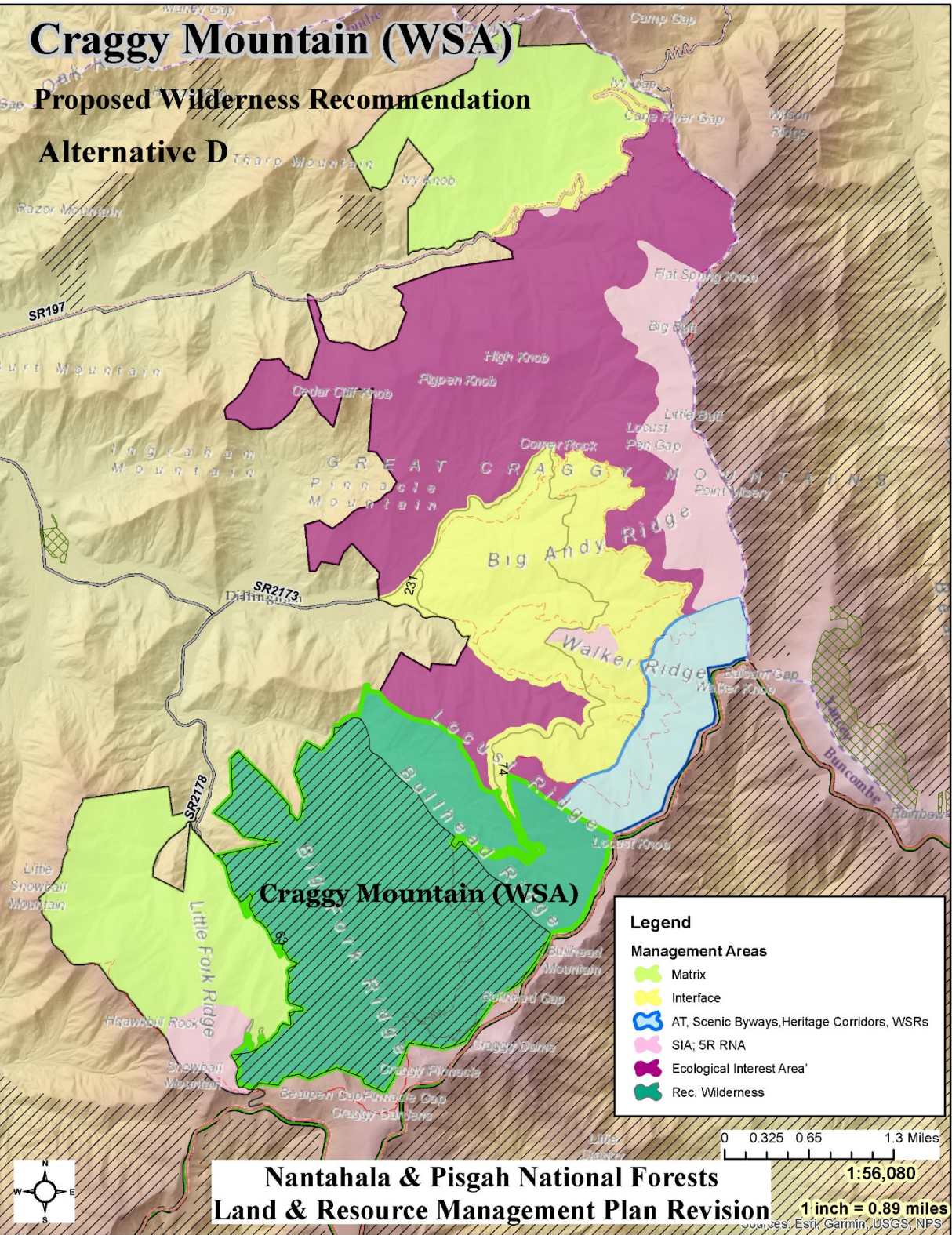
Acres of outstanding or reserved mineral rights: None

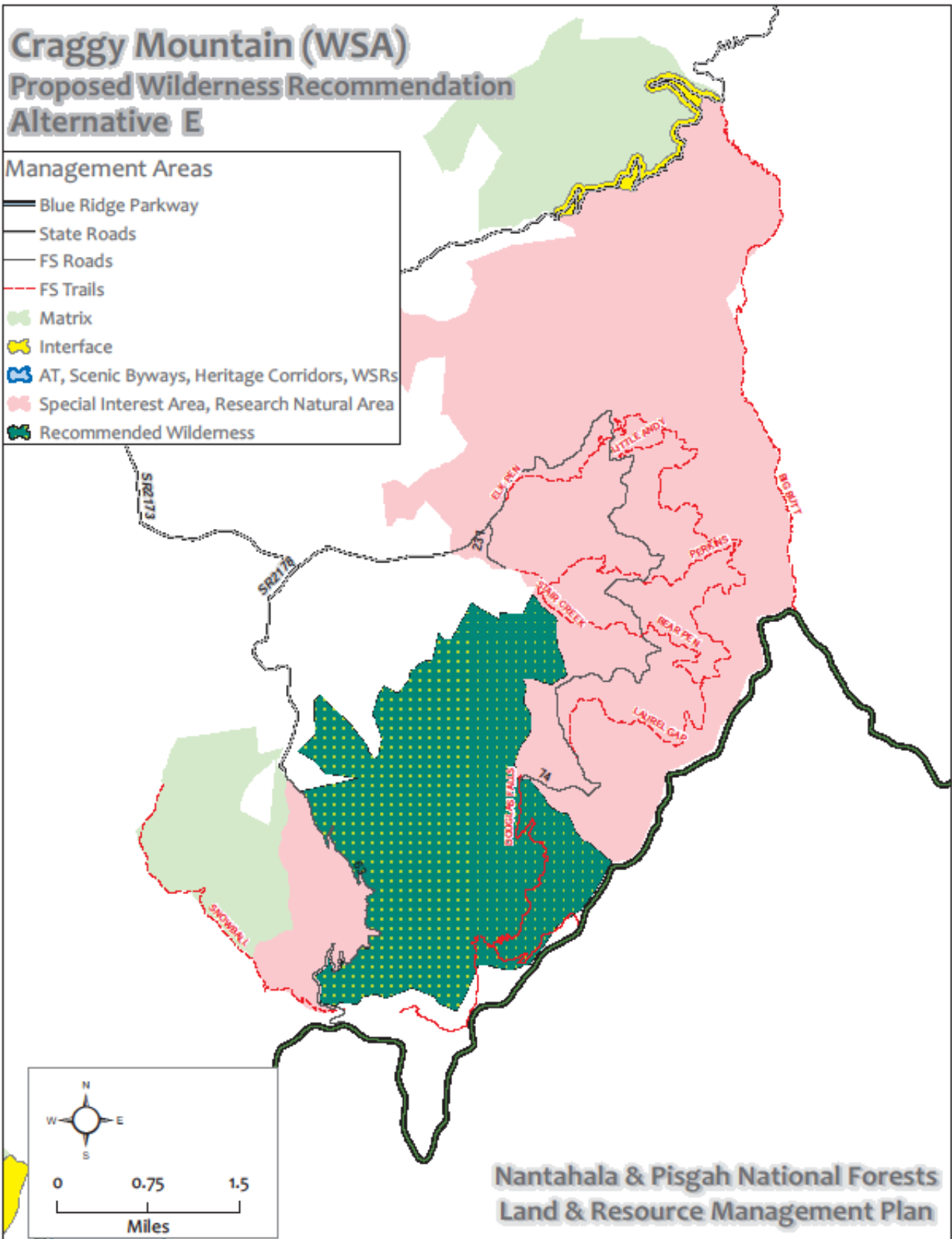
Alternative E recommends the entire Craggy Mountain Wilderness Study Area and an additional 647 acres north of the WSA. This portion of the evaluation area has the highest degree of natural and undeveloped characteristics consistent with wilderness. The area that was recommended in Alternative D was carefully considered and modified in Alternative E to incorporate additional acreage to the north which could be managed for preservation of wilderness characteristics. The area surrounding NFSR 74 was excluded from the recommended area to maintain the road in an open status and allow vehicular access to the Douglas Falls Trailhead. The area to the east between NFSR 74 and the Blue Ridge Parkway was also excluded in Alternative E because of its proximity to these open roads which are only ½ mile apart at their nearest point.

The northern portion of the area analyzed in Alternative B was not recommended for wilderness designation because it is only connected to the WSA by a narrow strip of NFS land. This strip of NFS land is only 700 feet wide at its narrowest point and less than a mile at its widest; and extends along the eastern boundary for over 4.5 miles. The Alternative B boundary also cherry-stems NFS Road 74 for over a mile, which would limit the ability to repair the road in an area with a history of landslides. The Alternative D boundaries also limit any opportunity for relocating or expanding the existing network of NFS trails which allow mountain bike use. These factors all contributed to the Forest Supervisor decision not to recommend the entire area analyzed in Alternative B. However, in response to public comments, portions of the Craggy Mountains area which are not recommended for wilderness designation in Alternative E, were identified as an expanded Forest Scenic Area and allocated to the Special Interest management area.









Ellicott Rock Wilderness Extension

Nantahala Ranger District / Highland Domes Geographic Area

Acres Evaluated: 824

Ellicott Rock Wilderness Extension evaluation area lies west of Ellicott Rock Wilderness. Within the evaluation area, portions to the east and south of Norton Branch have a moderate degree of natural and undeveloped character, which are affected partly by the presence of a NFS trail that allows bike use. There are opportunities primitive and unconfined recreation in this eastern portion, but an adjacent open road and developed campground affect solitude to some degree. Areas west of Norton Branch contain recent timber harvests, large wildlife fields, and diminished opportunities for solitude and unconfined recreation due to an irregular boundary configuration and proximity to open roads.

Alternative B

Acres Recommended: 570

Acres in Wilderness Study Area: None

Acres in Inventoried Roadless Area: None

Miles of NFS roads (ML1 & 2): None

Acres of vegetation management (< 20 years old): None

Acres of maintained wildlife fields: None

Miles of NFS trail managed for bicycle use: 2.5

Acres of non-federal inholdings: None

Acres of outstanding or reserved mineral rights: 62

Alternative B recommends a portion of the evaluation area east of Norton Branch for wilderness designation. This area has a moderate degree of wilderness characteristics; solitude is affected to some degree by an adjacent developed campground and road; naturalness and undeveloped characteristics are affected by a NFS trail that allows bike use; and opportunities for primitive and unconfined recreation are affected to some degree by the trail that splits the area in half. Bicycles are considered mechanized transport, which is not considered a form of primitive recreation, and would therefore not be an allowed use if this area was recommended for wilderness. Area boundaries were driven by public comment, and recommendation of this portion of the evaluation area is supported by wilderness advocacy groups.

Alternative C

Acres Recommended: None

Consistent with the theme of Alternative C, this area is not recommended.

Alternative D

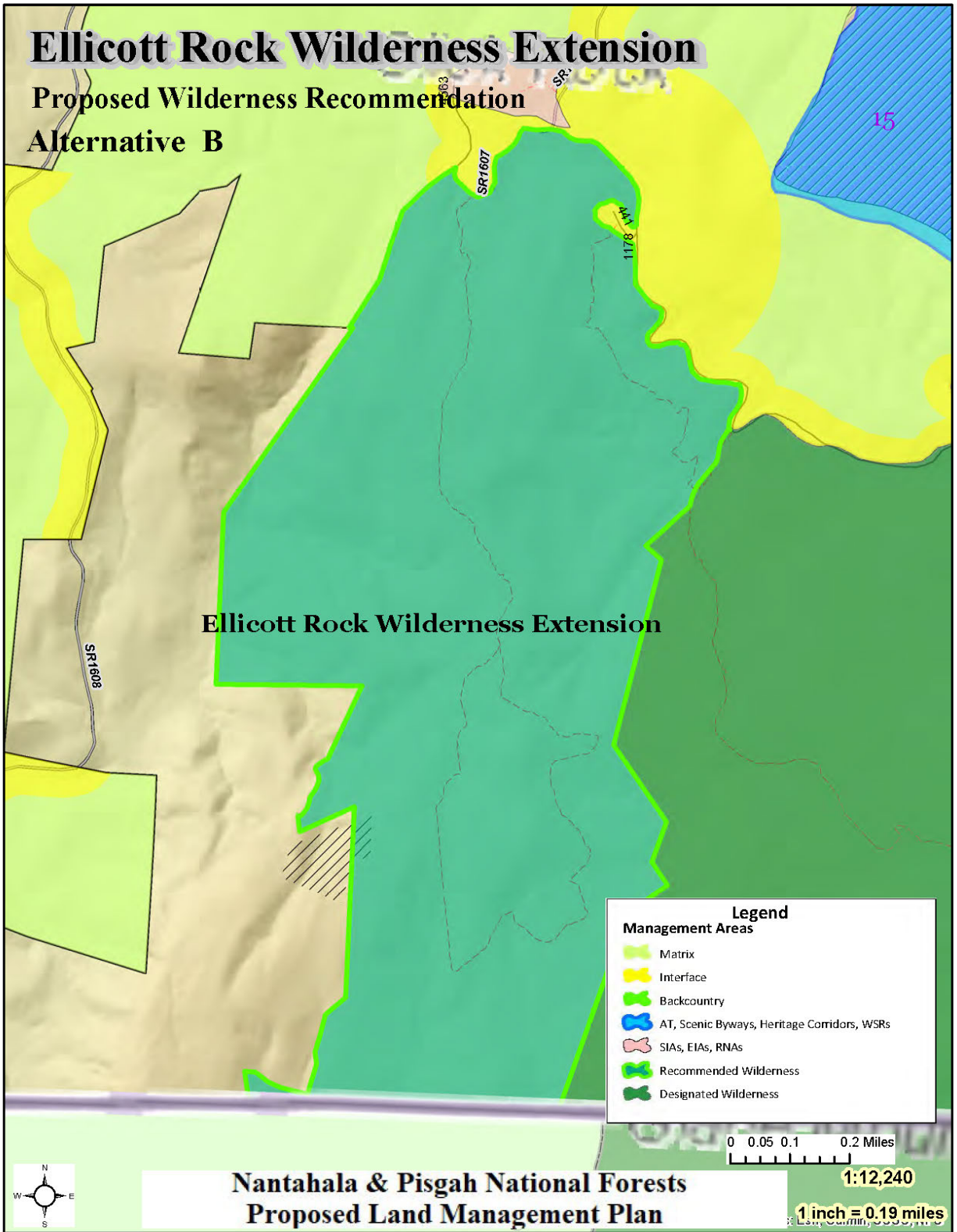
Acres Recommended: None

Consistent with the Alternative D theme of recommending only areas with the highest quality wilderness characteristics, Ellicott Rock Wilderness Extension was not included in this alternative because it only has a moderate degree of wilderness characteristics. As described above, wilderness characteristics are affected by an adjacent developed campground, open roads, and a highly developed trail managed for bicycle use that bisects the area.

Alternative E (Preferred Alternative)

Acres Recommended: None

After consideration of the analysis and public comments, this area is not recommended in Alternative E. As noted in the summary of the Ellicott Rock Wilderness extension analysis summary for Alternative B, this area only contains a moderate degree of wilderness characteristics. The western boundary interfaces with private lands, the northern boundary is adjacent to an open NFS road and developed campground, and the area is almost bisected by a NFS trail which is managed for bicycle use. It was also recently discovered that the area also contains past management activities to the north and open fields and a small pond impoundment to the south. All of these factors contributed to the Forest Supervisor decision not to recommend the area in Alternative E.



Harper Creek

Grandfather Ranger District / Eastern Escarpment Geographic Area

Acres Evaluated: 7,457

Overall, the Harper Creek evaluation area is predominately natural appearing and undeveloped; and has opportunities for solitude, and for primitive and unconfined recreation. The area also has other features of value with its outstanding scenery and geology. Harper Creek has been managed to preserve its wilderness characteristics since designation by congress as a Wilderness Study Area in 1984, and is recommended for wilderness designation in the 1994 LRMP. The area is also an Inventoried Roadless Area. The evaluation area contains a high degree of wilderness characteristics, with the exception of a few small wildlife fields and their access routes that are within the area and have been maintained under provisions of the current LRMP. These detract from the natural and undeveloped characteristics in their immediate vicinity. There is also a small area on the southwest side of the evaluation area that is not in the WSA/IRA. Due to the topography this area is separated from the rest of the area, and solitude is potentially impacted by sights and sounds of the nearby NC Highway 181. Also, the Harper Creek evaluation area has no NFS trails managed or authorized for bicycle use (mechanized transport), but many trails are used by cyclists illegally or unknowingly. This is an education, compliance, and law enforcement issue, but the unauthorized use does not adversely impact wilderness characteristics.

Alternatives B, D, and E

Acres Recommended: 7,044

Acres in Wilderness Study Area: 7,036

Acres in Inventoried Roadless Area: 7,025 (overlaps WSA)

Miles of NFS roads (ML1 & 2): None

Acres of vegetation management (< 20 years old): None

Acres of maintained wildlife fields: 4.5

Miles of NFS trail managed for bicycle use: None

Acres of non-federal inholdings: None

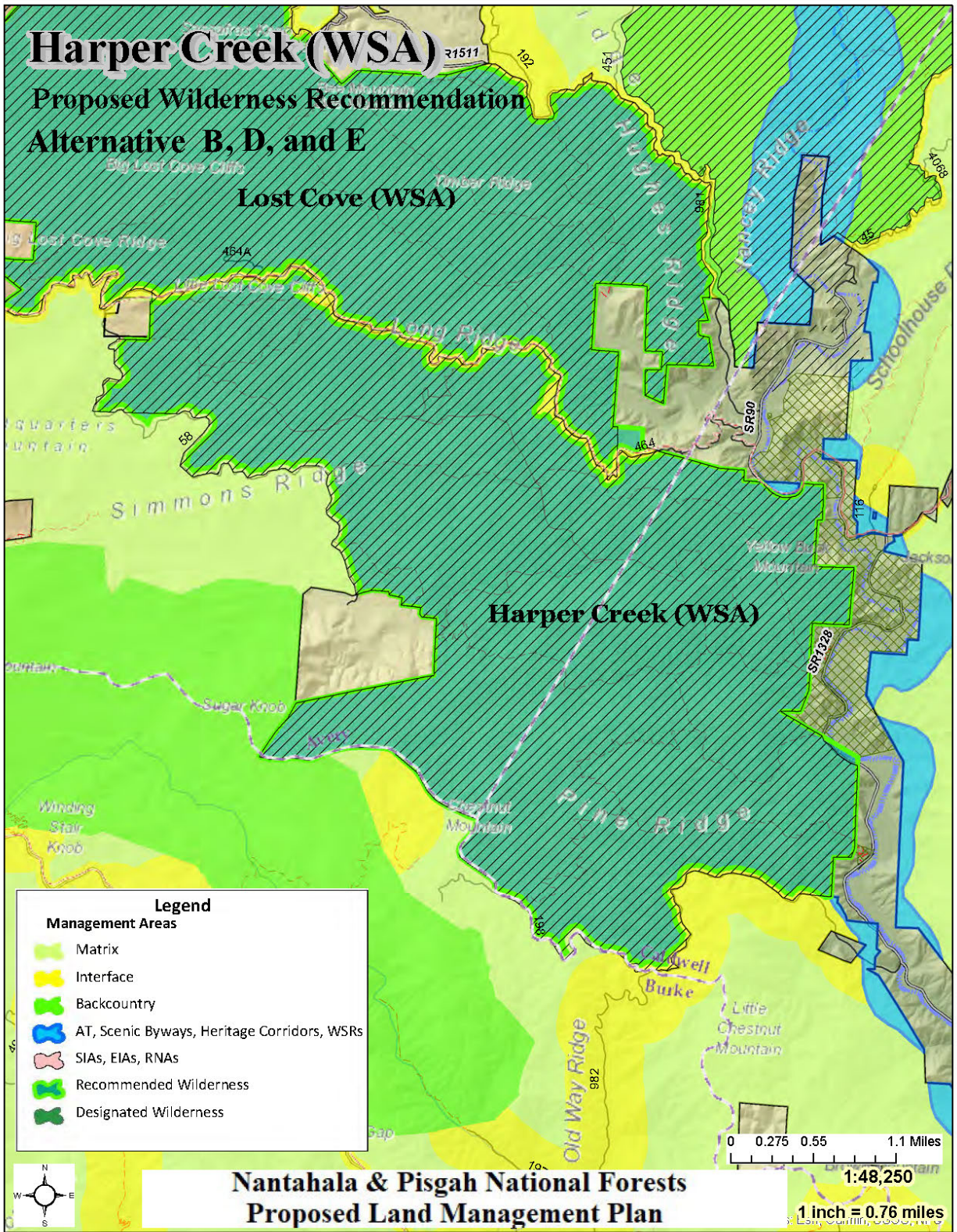
Acres of outstanding or reserved mineral rights: None

Because Harper Creek was studied and recommended for wilderness designation in the 1994 LRMP, and has been managed to preserve wilderness characteristics since designated as a WSA in 1984, the area has a high degree of wilderness characteristics. Recommendation of this area is also consistent with themes of both Alternatives B and D. Recommended area boundaries generally follow WSA/IRA boundaries, with some minor adjustments for consistent road buffers and to exclude a small non-WSA/IRA lobe to the southwest. These boundaries are also consistent with public input. Under alternatives B, D, and E, maintenance of wildlife fields would be allowed to continue until wilderness designation by congress. Recommendation of the area for wilderness designation is supported by wilderness advocacy groups and individuals. However, there is opposition for recommendation from other wilderness advocacy and cycling groups, even though there are no managed or authorized bicycle trails in the area.

Alternative C

Acres Recommended: None

Consistent with the theme of Alternative C, this area is not recommended. To address public desire by some groups and individuals that are seeking the future potential for mechanized recreation opportunities (i.e. mountain biking) in the area, Alternative C does not recommend Harper Creek evaluation area for wilderness designation.



Joyce Kilmer-Slickrock Wilderness Extension (#2) - Deep Creek / Avey Creek

Cheoah Ranger District / Unicoi Mountains & Fontana Lake Geographic Areas

Acres Evaluated: 2,313

The Joyce Kilmer-Slickrock Wilderness Extension (#2) - Deep Creek / Avey Creek evaluation area is predominately undeveloped and natural appearing, with the exception of two miles of NFS ML1 road and 1.2 miles of ML2 road that extend into the area. These NFS roads are managed as closed year-round, and except for fire suppression activities, neither are mowed as linear wildlife openings or used for vegetation management activities. The ML1 Deep Creek Road 445 is now used as part of Deep Creek Trail TR46 for wilderness access. As an extension to Joyce Kilmer-Slickrock Wilderness, the evaluation area has opportunities for solitude, and for primitive and unconfined recreation. Occasional impacts to solitude may occur along the southeastern border from the adjacent State Road 1127 to Maple Springs, especially during the annual Dragon Hill Climb race event. Other boundaries are adjacent to designated wilderness or undeveloped NFS lands.

Alternatives B & D

Acres Recommended: 2,355 (Additional acreage included with application of consistent road buffer.)

Acres in Wilderness Study Area: None

Acres in Inventoried Roadless Area: 1,895

Miles of NFS roads (ML1 & 2): 3.2

Acres of vegetation management (< 20 years old): None

Acres of maintained wildlife fields: None

Miles of NFS trail managed for bicycle use: None

Acres of non-federal inholdings: None

Acres of outstanding or reserved mineral rights: None

Since most of the evaluation area has been managed as an IRA, it retains moderate to high wilderness characteristics. These attributes are consistent with themes of both Alternative B and D. Although there are some impacts to the undeveloped characteristic and opportunities for solitude associated with low maintenance level NFS roads within the area and uses on an adjacent State road, none of these impacts are pervasive throughout the evaluation area. As an extension to the existing Joyce Kilmer-Slickrock Wilderness, there are many opportunities for primitive and unconfined recreation.

Alternative C

Acres Recommended: None

Consistent with the theme of Alternative C, this area is not recommended.

Alternative E (Preferred Alternative)

Acres Recommended: 1,912

Acres in Wilderness Study Area: None

Acres in Inventoried Roadless Area: 1,895

Miles of NFS roads (ML1 & 2): 2.0

Acres of vegetation management (< 20 years old): None

Acres of maintained wildlife fields: None

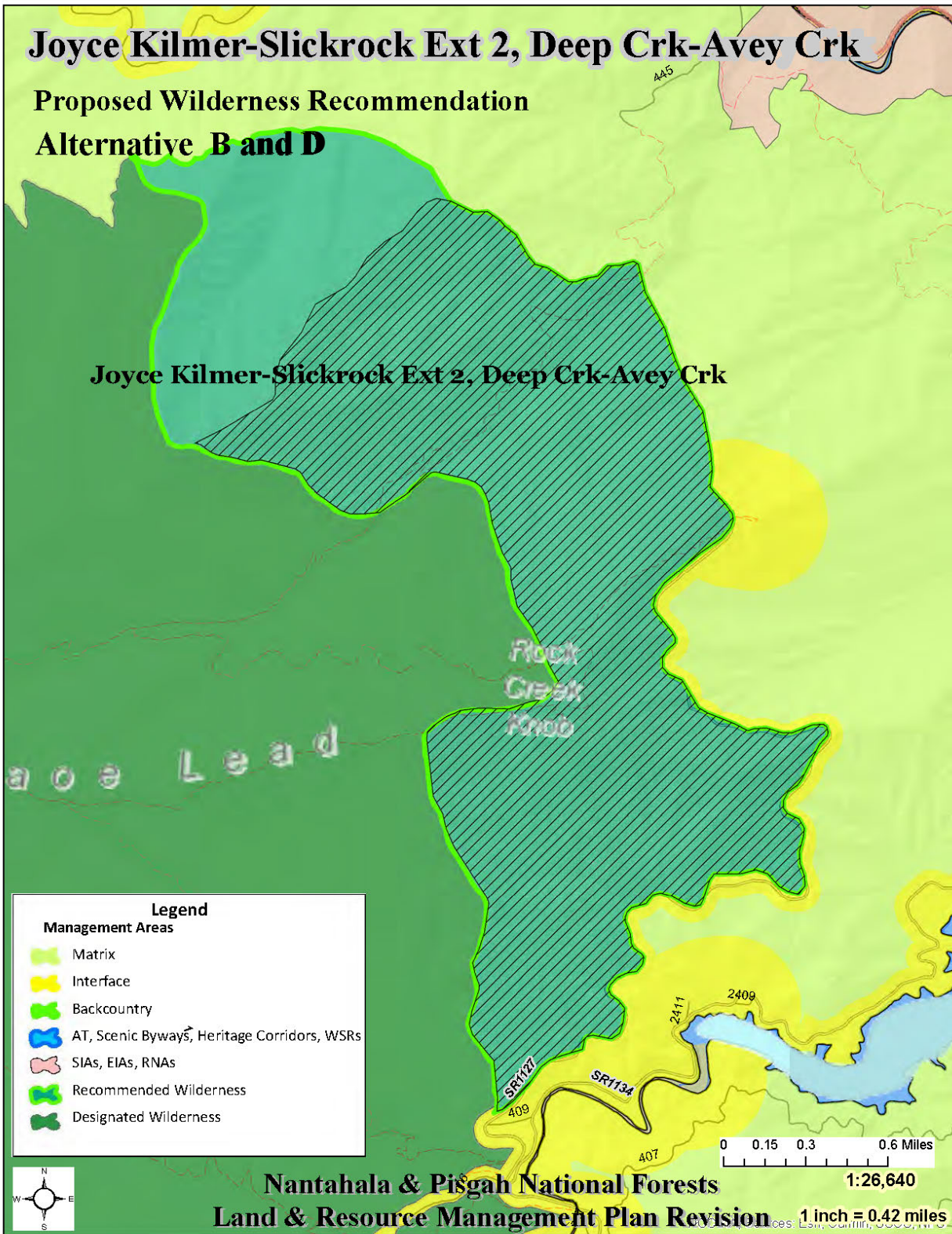
Miles of NFS trail managed for bicycle use: None

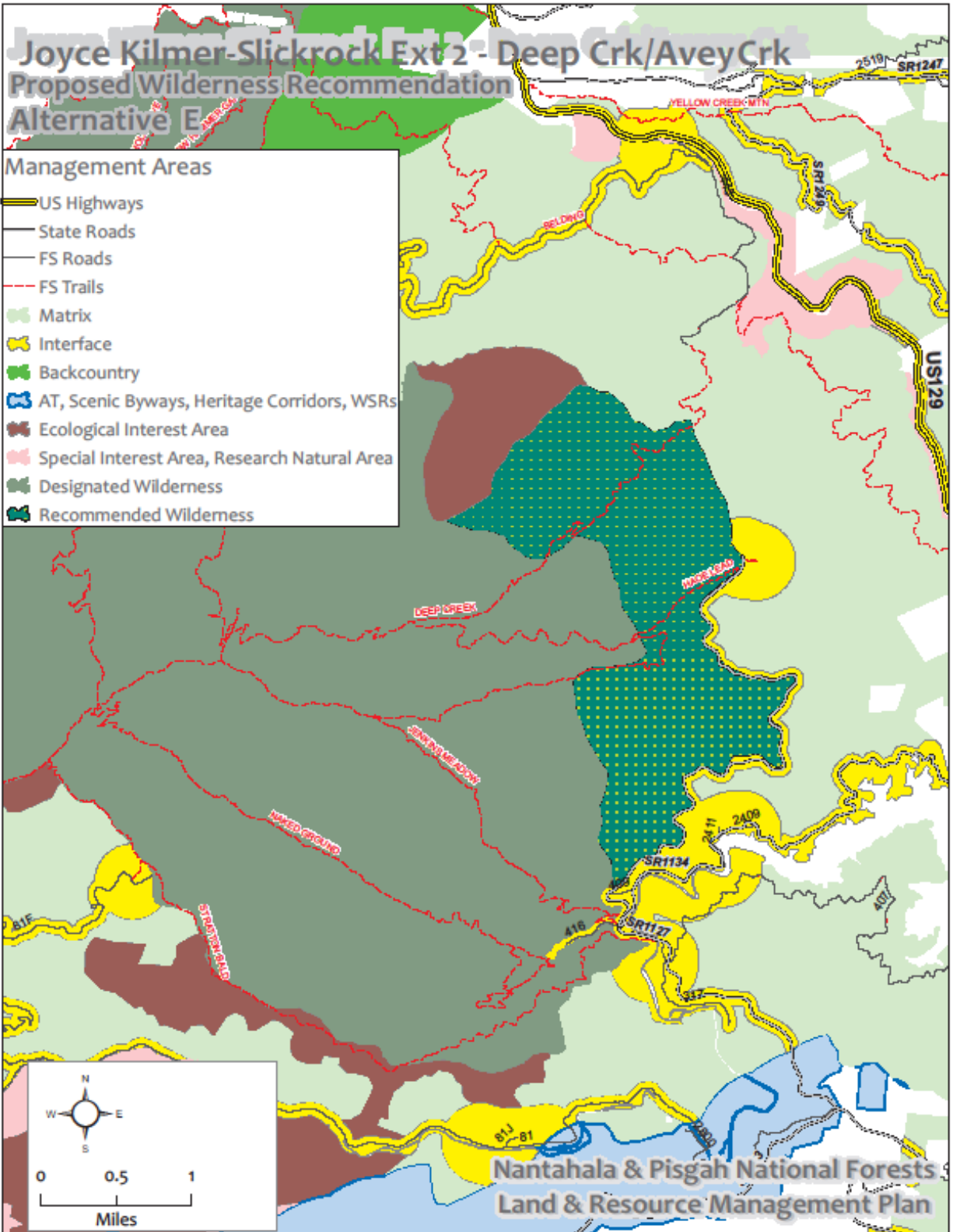
Acres of non-federal inholdings: None

Acres of outstanding or reserved mineral rights: None

Alternative E recommends only the IRA portion of the evaluation area, which was adjusted to include 17 acres between the IRA and existing wilderness boundaries. As an extension to the existing Joyce Kilmer-Slickrock Wilderness, the recommended area has high quality natural and undeveloped characteristics and offers opportunities for solitude and primitive and unconfined recreation. Two miles of ML1 Deep Creek Road will be considered for decommissioning if no longer being utilized.

The recommended area in Alternative E excludes the Barker Creek drainage to the north, which contains 1.2 miles of NFS road and had previously been identified for potential wildlife habitat improvement projects in coordination with the NCWRC. Because of the existing NFS road, the Barker Creek drainage was not part of the adjacent IRA. As a commitment to shared stewardship of wildlife resources, in combination with the other factors described above, the Forest Supervisor chose not to recommend the Barker Creek portion of the Deep Creek/Avey Creek area.





Joyce Kilmer-Slickrock Wilderness Extension (#3) - Yellowhammer Branch

Cheoah Ranger District / Unicoi Mountains & Fontana Lake Geographic Areas

Acres Evaluated: 1,207

The Joyce Kilmer-Slickrock Wilderness Extension (#3) – The Yellowhammer Branch area has been managed as an IRA since 2001. The area is natural appearing and undeveloped, with no structures, highly developed trails, nor NFS roads. There are opportunities for solitude, and for primitive and unconfined recreation on its hike-only NFS trails, and across the area. Motor boats may be seen and heard to the north along Calderwood Lake, and sights and sounds of development and US Highway 129 may be experienced along the eastern borders, but those impacts are not pervasive. As an extension to Joyce Kilmer-Slickrock Wilderness, the area could be managed to preserve wilderness characteristics. However, the area does contain a small inholding to the north near Calderwood Lake, and private lands of Tapoco Lodge extend into the area forming a narrow finger of private ownership. Two new trails have been proposed in the area, which connect with Tapoco Lodge property: Bear Creek Falls Trail and a recent realignment of the Benton MacKaye Trail. Public comments referenced nearby civil war era gravesites as a historic feature, but these are outside the evaluation area and have no bearing on potential recommendation.

Alternative B

Acres Recommended: None

Although this area does have high quality wilderness characteristics, some local residents and wilderness advocacy groups oppose recommendation because of its proximity to Tapoco Lodge which attracts tourism to the surrounding area. Yellowhammer Branch evaluation area is not recommended for wilderness designation in this alternative as a response to those public comments.

Alternative C

Acres Recommended: None

Consistent with the theme of Alternative C, this area is not recommended.

Alternative D

Acres Recommended: 1,272 (Additional acreage was included with removal of lake shore buffer.)

Acres in Wilderness Study Area: None

Acres in Inventoried Roadless Area: 1,256

Miles of NFS roads (ML1 & 2): None

Acres of vegetation management (< 20 years old): None

Acres of maintained wildlife fields: None

Miles of NFS trail managed for bicycle use: None

Acres of non-federal inholdings: 0

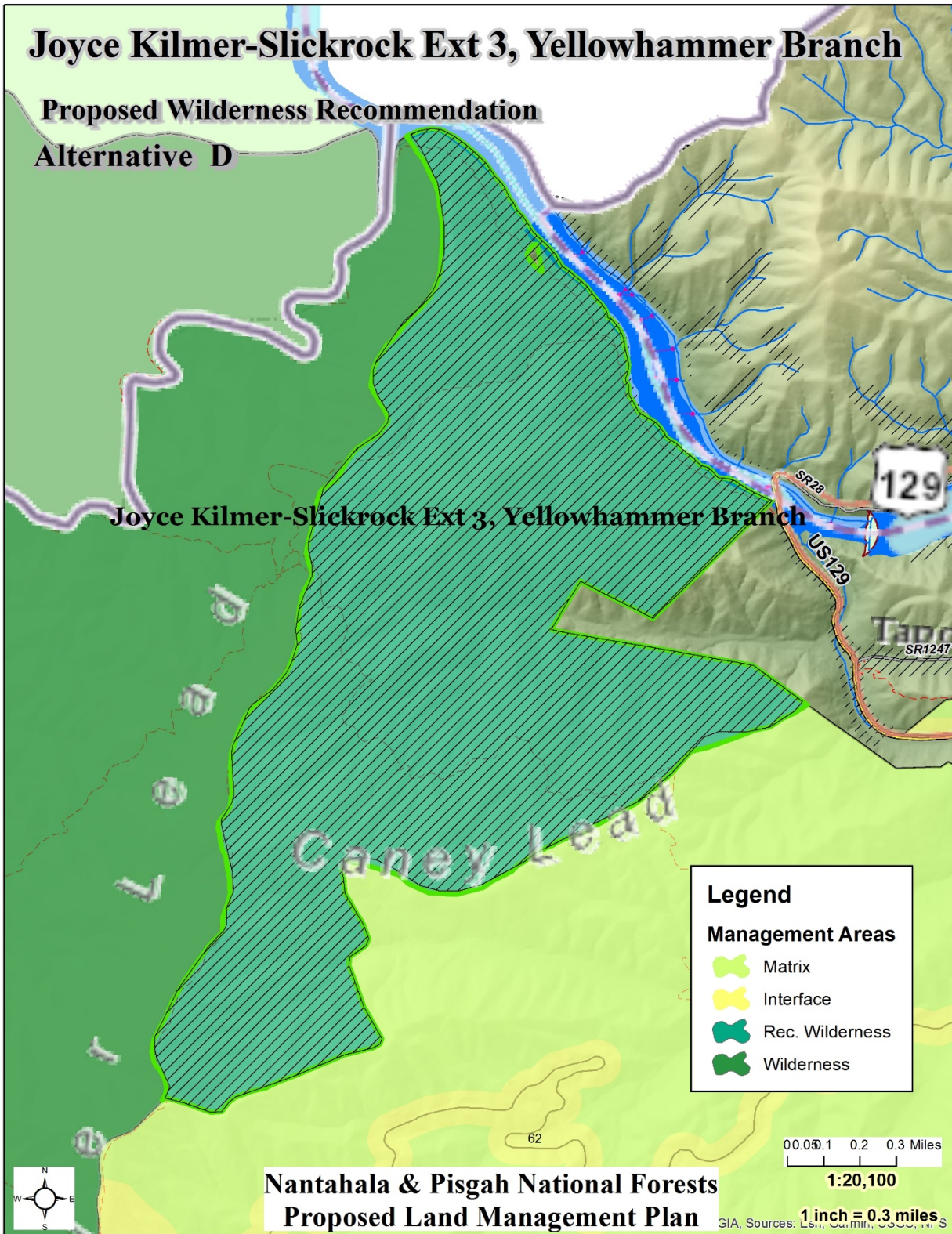
Acres of outstanding or reserved mineral rights: None

Consistent with the theme of Alternative D, Yellowhammer Branch evaluation area is recommended for wilderness designation in this alternative because of its high-quality wilderness characteristics as described above. Detractors to these characteristics include motorboat and vehicular use seen or heard along the northern and eastern boundaries which may impact solitude; however, these are not pervasive across the whole area.

Alternative E (Preferred Alternative)

Acres Recommended: None

Although this area does have some high quality wilderness characteristics, there are detractors such as sights and sounds of motorized boat use on Calderwood Lake to the north and vehicles on US129 to the east. There was also a lack of support for recommendation from county residents and some wilderness advocacy groups because of the proximity to Tapoco Lodge which offers guest hikes along Yellowhammer Branch and is nearly surrounded by the area on three sides. The lodge also attracts tourism and provides economic benefits to Graham County. After consideration of the analysis and public comments, the Forest Supervisor decided not to recommend the Yellowhammer Branch area for wilderness designation in Alternative E.



Joyce Kilmer-Slickrock Wilderness Extension (#4) - Sugar Cove Branch

Cheoah Ranger District / Unicoi Mountains Geographic Area

Acres Evaluated: 326

Joyce Kilmer-Slickrock Extension (#4) - Sugar Cove Branch evaluation area is undeveloped and predominately natural appearing, with no structures, highly developed trails, or NFS roads. There is evidence of past logging that has revegetated and blends with the natural landscape. The hike-only Hangover Lead Trail TR56 follows the western boundary along Joyce Kilmer-Slickrock Wilderness, and the only potential impacts to solitude would be the sights and sounds of vehicles on NFS road 62; which gets relatively little traffic. As an extension to Joyce Kilmer-Slickrock Wilderness, which surrounds the triangularly-shaped area on two sides, Sugar Cove Branch evaluation area offers ample opportunities for primitive and unconfined recreation even with its small size.

Alternatives B, D, and E

Acres Recommended: 326

Acres in Wilderness Study Area: None

Acres in Inventoried Roadless Area: None

Miles of NFS roads (ML1 & 2): None

Acres of vegetation management (< 20 years old): None

Acres of maintained wildlife fields: None

Miles of NFS trail managed for bicycle use: None

Acres of non-federal inholdings: None

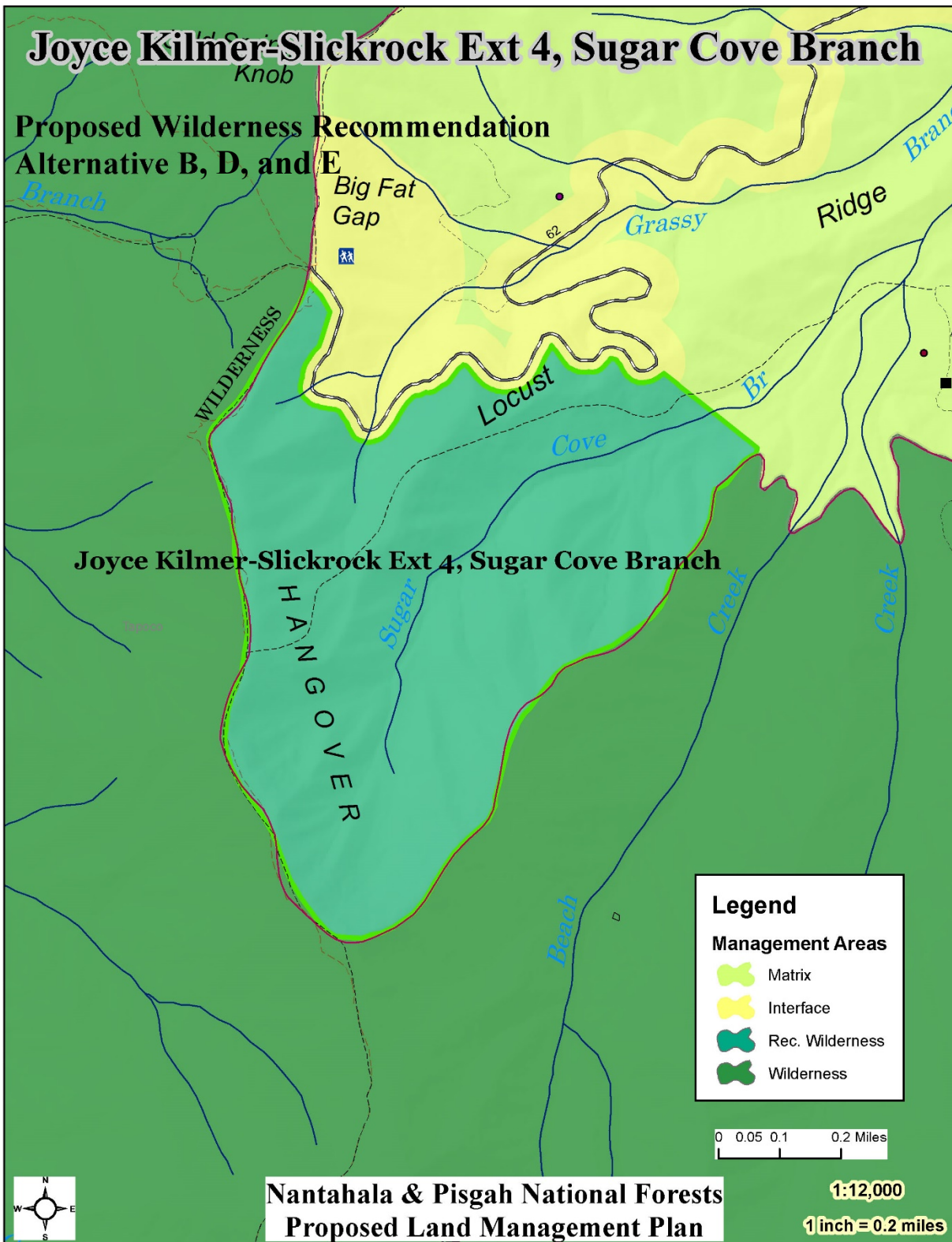
Acres of outstanding or reserved mineral rights: None

Joyce Kilmer-Slickrock Wilderness Extension (#4) - Sugar Cove Branch evaluation area contains high quality wilderness characteristics as a potential extension to Joyce Kilmer-Slickrock Wilderness. The area is also supported for recommendation by wilderness advocacy groups and individuals.

Alternative C

Acres Recommended: None

Consistent with the theme of Alternative C, this area is not recommended.



Linville Gorge Wilderness Extension / Linville Gorge Addition

Grandfather Ranger District / Eastern Escarpment Geographic Area

Acres Evaluated: 2,844

The Linville Gorge Wilderness Extension evaluation area lies to the southeast of Linville Gorge Wilderness. The area has opportunities for solitude and primitive and unconfined recreation. It also has unique geology, scenery, and rare plant habitats. As an IRA the area has been managed to preserve its roadless character since 2001; therefore, it contains no NFS roads, recent timber management, or maintained wildlife fields. However, the evaluation area has served as a buffer to contain the spread of multiple wildfires. In the northern third of the area there is a heavily maintained non-system access route and cleared staging area which is also a helicopter landing zone. This east-west access route is a mile long and almost traverses the area's width. Additionally, there are multiple fire breaks emanating from the staging area and extending north and south. These features negatively affect the natural and undeveloped characteristics across much of the area.

Alternative B

Acres Recommended: 2,920 (Additional acreage included with application of consistent road buffer.)

Acres in Wilderness Study Area: None

Acres in Inventoried Roadless Area: 2,761

Miles of NFS roads (ML1 & 2): None

Acres of vegetation management (< 20 years old): None

Acres of maintained wildlife fields: None

Miles of NFS trail managed for bicycle use: None

Acres of non-federal inholdings: None

Acres of outstanding or reserved mineral rights: None

Linville Gorge Wilderness Extension is recommended in this alternative because it has support from wilderness advocates and it has a moderate degree of wilderness characteristics, particularly related to opportunities for solitude, primitive and unconfined recreation, and other features of value.

Alternative C

Acres Recommended: None

Consistent with the theme of Alternative C, this area is not recommended.

Alternative D

Acres Recommended: None

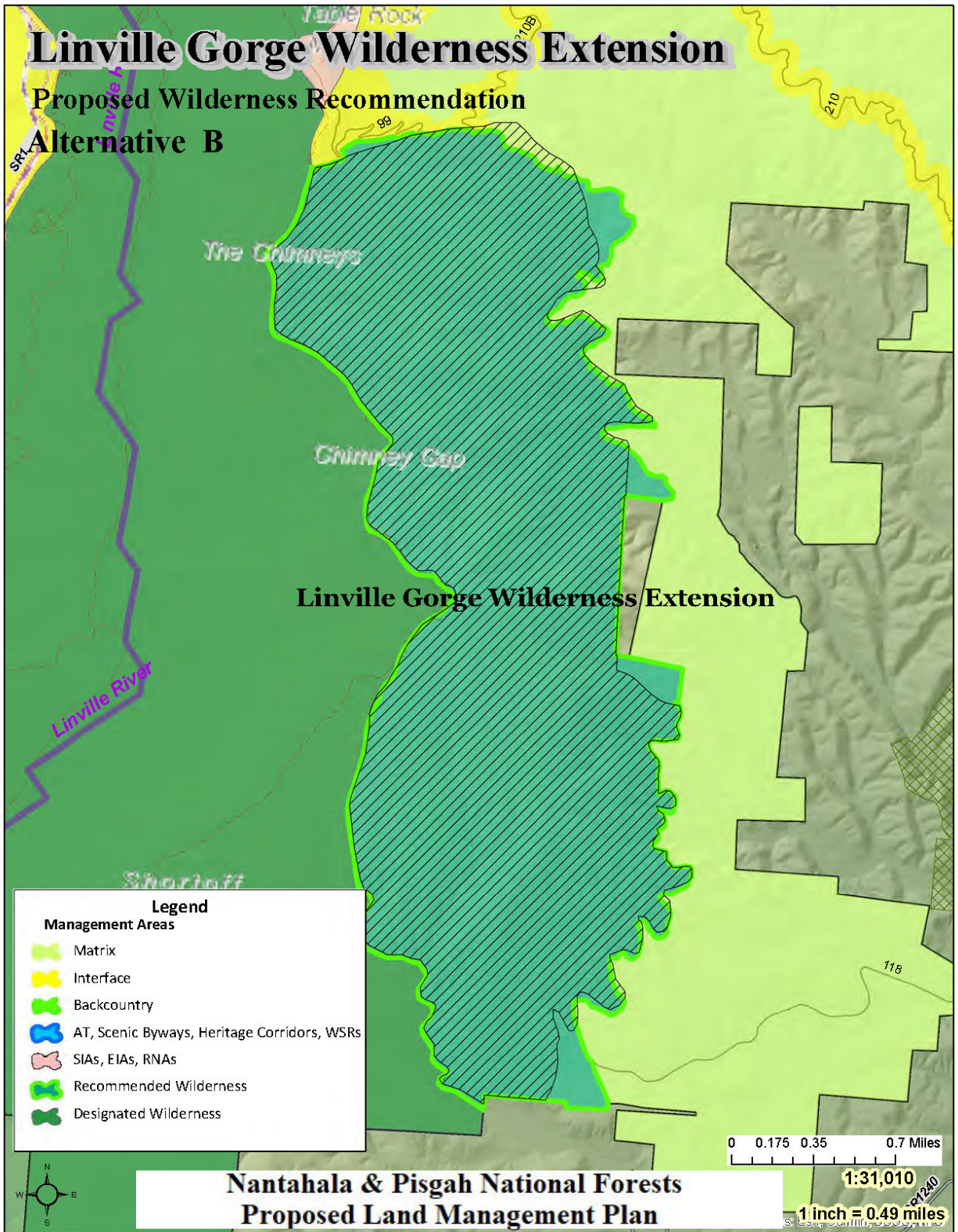
With its history as an area used to contain wildfires and provide non-wilderness access and staging for aggressive fire suppression activities, the natural and undeveloped characteristics of this area are negatively affected. The result is an area with a moderate degree of wilderness characteristics. Consistent with the theme of alternative D to only recommend areas with the highest quality wilderness characteristics, Linville Gorge Wilderness Extension is not recommended in this alternative.

Alternative E (Preferred Alternative)

Acres Recommended: None

After consideration of the analysis and public comments, this area is not recommended in Alternative E.

This area has a history of being used to contain wildfires and provide non-wilderness access and staging for aggressive fire suppression activities. There is a need to continue fire management and suppression in this area. Existing dozer fire lines, the helicopter landing zone, and staging area also detract from the natural characteristics of the area. When considered in total, these factors detract from the area's potential suitability for inclusion in the national wilderness preservation system.



Lost Cove

Grandfather Ranger District / Eastern Escarpment Geographic Area

Acres Evaluated: 5,934

Overall, the Lost Cove evaluation area is predominately natural appearing and undeveloped, and has opportunities for solitude, and for primitive and unconfined recreation. The area also has other features of value with its outstanding scenery and geology. Lost Cove has been managed to preserve its wilderness characteristics since designation by congress as a Wilderness Study Area in 1984, and is recommended for wilderness designation in the 1994 LRMP. The area is also an Inventoried Roadless Area. The evaluation area contains a high degree of wilderness characteristics, with the exception of a few small wildlife fields and their access routes or roads which are within the area and have been maintained under provisions of the 1994 LRMP. These fields detract from the natural and undeveloped characteristics in their immediate vicinity. The Lost Cove evaluation area has no NFS trails managed or authorized for bicycle use (mechanized transport), but many trails are used by cyclists illegally or unknowingly. This is an education, compliance, and law enforcement issue, but the unauthorized use does not adversely impact wilderness characteristics.

Alternatives B and D,

Acres Recommended: 5,706

Acres in Wilderness Study Area: 5,699

Acres in Inventoried Roadless Area: 5,684

Miles of NFS roads (ML1 & 2): 1.4

Acres of vegetation management (< 20 years old): None

Acres of maintained wildlife fields: 6.0

Miles of NFS trail managed for bicycle use: None

Acres of non-federal inholdings: None

Acres of outstanding or reserved mineral rights: None

Because Lost Cove was studied and recommended for wilderness designation in the current LRMP, and has been managed to preserve wilderness characteristics since designated as a WSA in 1984, the area has a high degree of wilderness characteristics. Recommendation of this area is consistent with themes of both Alternatives B and D. Recommended area boundaries generally follow WSA/IRA boundaries, with some minor adjustments for consistent road buffers. These boundaries are also consistent with public input. Under alternatives B and D, maintenance of wildlife fields would be allowed to continue until wilderness designation by congress. Recommendation of the area for wilderness designation is supported by some wilderness advocacy groups and individuals; however, there is also opposition for recommendation from groups and individuals that would like to see mountain biking opportunities in the area even though there are no managed or authorized bicycle trails in this WSA.

Alternative C

Acres Recommended: None

Consistent with the theme of Alternative C, this area is not recommended. To address public desire by some groups and individuals that are seeking the future potential for mechanized recreation opportunities (i.e. mountain biking) in the area, Alternative C does not recommend Harper Creek evaluation area for wilderness designation.

Alternative E (Preferred Alternative)

Acres Recommended: 5,681

Acres in Wilderness Study Area: 5,659

Acres in Inventoried Roadless Area: 5,659

Miles of NFS roads (ML1 & 2): 1.4

Acres of vegetation management (< 20 years old): None

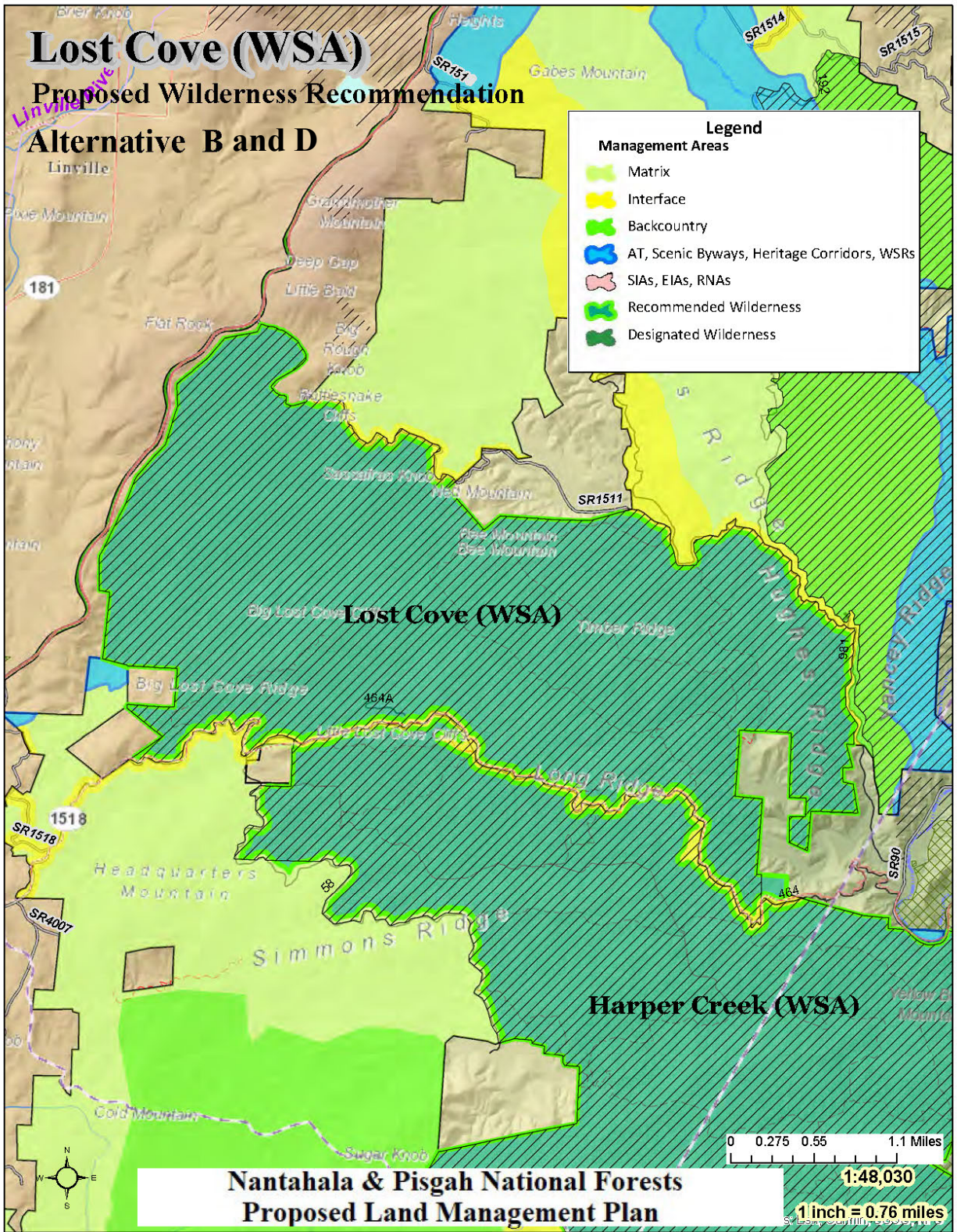
Acres of maintained wildlife fields: 6.0

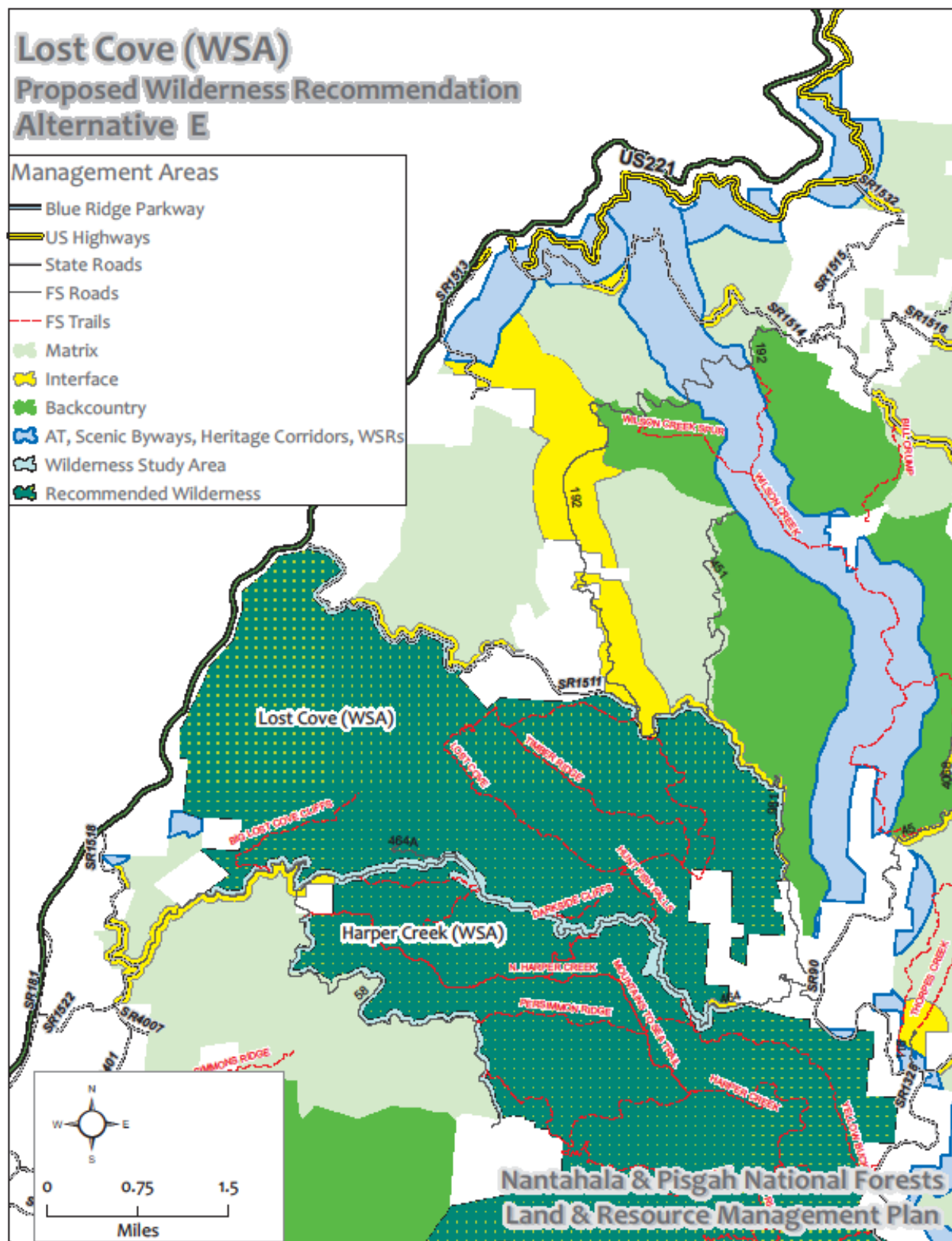
Miles of NFS trail managed for bicycle use: None

Acres of non-federal inholdings: None

Acres of outstanding or reserved mineral rights: None

Because Lost Cove was studied and recommended for wilderness designation in the current LRMP and has been managed to preserve wilderness characteristics since designation as a Wilderness Study Area in 1984, the area has a high degree of wilderness characteristics. Recommendation of this area is consistent with the theme of Alternative E. Recommended area boundaries generally follow WSA/IRA boundaries, with some minor adjustments for consistent road buffers. Under Alternatives E, maintenance of wildlife fields would be allowed to continue until wilderness designation by Congress, and 1.4 miles of NFS roads would be considered for decommissioning if no longer being utilized. Recommendation of the area for wilderness designation is supported by some wilderness advocacy groups and individuals; however, there is also opposition for recommendation from groups and individuals that would like to see mountain biking opportunities in the area, even though there are no managed or authorized bicycle trails in this WSA.





Mackey Mountain

Grandfather Ranger District / Black Mountains Geographic Area

Acres Evaluated: 14,985

Many parts of the Mackey Mountain evaluation area are undeveloped and natural appearing. There are also opportunities for solitude, and for primitive and unconfined recreation throughout the area. This is primarily true for the core Inventoried Roadless Area which has a high degree of wilderness characteristics and includes other features of value such as unique old growth forests and the historic significance of being part of the initial Weeks Act acquisition of lands for the Pisgah NF. However, evaluation area boundaries are irregular, creating many narrow peninsulas of federal ownership fragmented by fingers of private lands. There are also private inholdings, easements, NFS roads, and miles of boundary shared with private lands to the north and east; and a municipal water intake with an administrative access road to the south - all of which negatively impact the quality of wilderness characteristics in these specific locations as well as the manageability to preserve them. While sights and sounds of more distant communities and highways may affect solitude from certain high ridges and southeastern slopes, impacts from private development and roads several miles away are not pervasive across the entire area.

Alternative B

Acres Recommended: 13,509

Acres in Wilderness Study Area: None

Acres in Inventoried Roadless Area: 5,933

Miles of NFS roads (ML1 & 2): 1.5

Acres of vegetation management (< 20 years old): None

Acres of maintained wildlife fields: None

Miles of NFS trail managed for bicycle use: None

Acres of non-federal inholdings: 124

Acres of outstanding or reserved mineral rights: 184

Consistent with the theme of alternative B, this alternative recommends nearly the entire Mackey Mountain inventory and evaluation area. Some of the narrow fingers to the east are excluded in this alternative, but others remain, as does a 124 acre inholding of residentially developed private lands. As stated, this irregular ownership pattern, increased interface with private lands, roads, and a large developed inholding negatively affect opportunities for solitude, primitive and unconfined recreation, undeveloped characteristics, and manageability to preserve wilderness characteristics in these locations. This results in a moderate to high degree of wilderness characteristics overall, with the highest quality wilderness characteristics in the core IRA.

Alternative C

Acres Recommended: None

Consistent with the theme of Alternative C, this area is not recommended.

Alternative D and E

Acres Recommended: 7,872

Acres in Wilderness Study Area: None

Acres in Inventoried Roadless Area: 5,890

Miles of NFS roads (ML1 & 2): None

Acres of vegetation management (< 20 years old): None

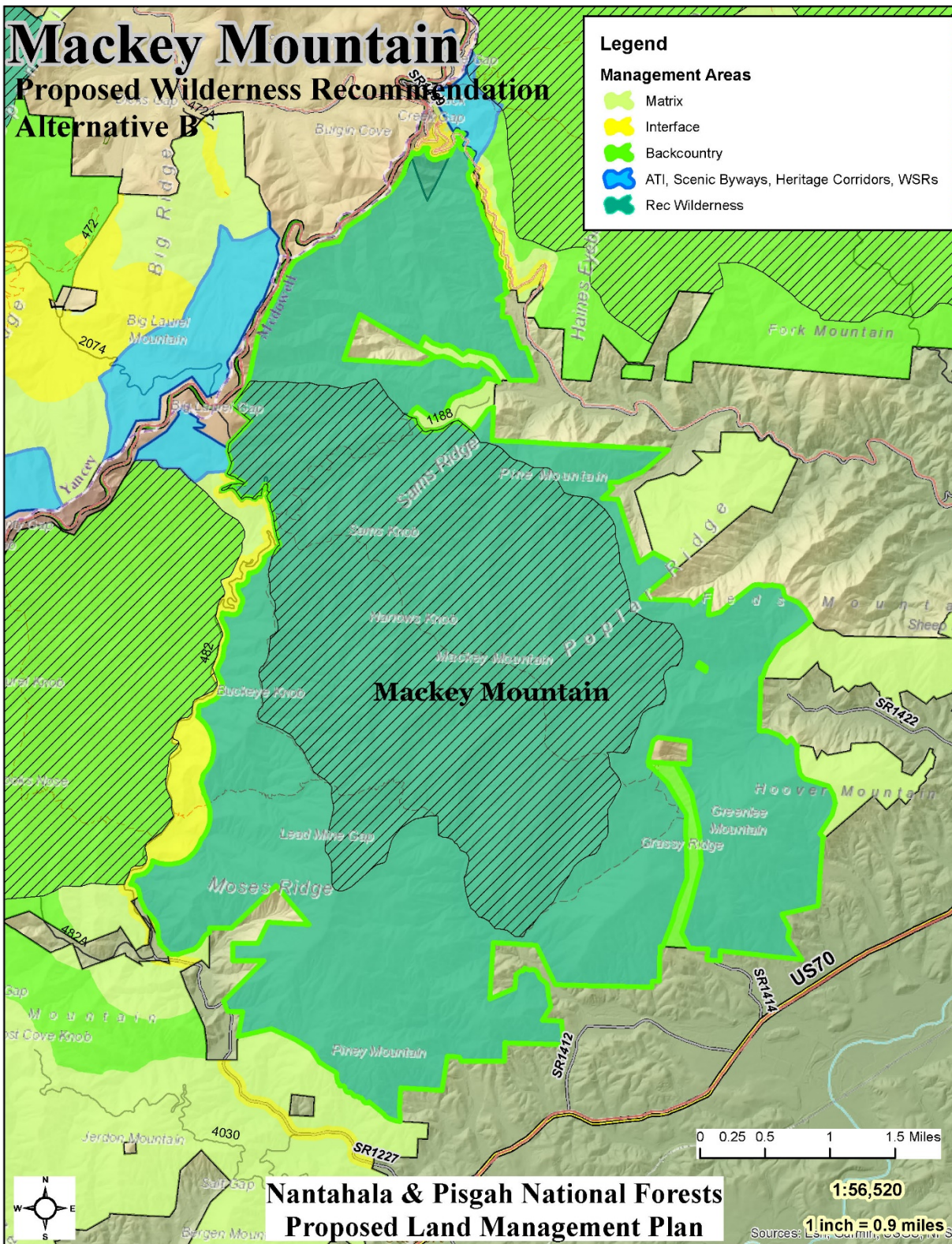
Acres of maintained wildlife fields: None

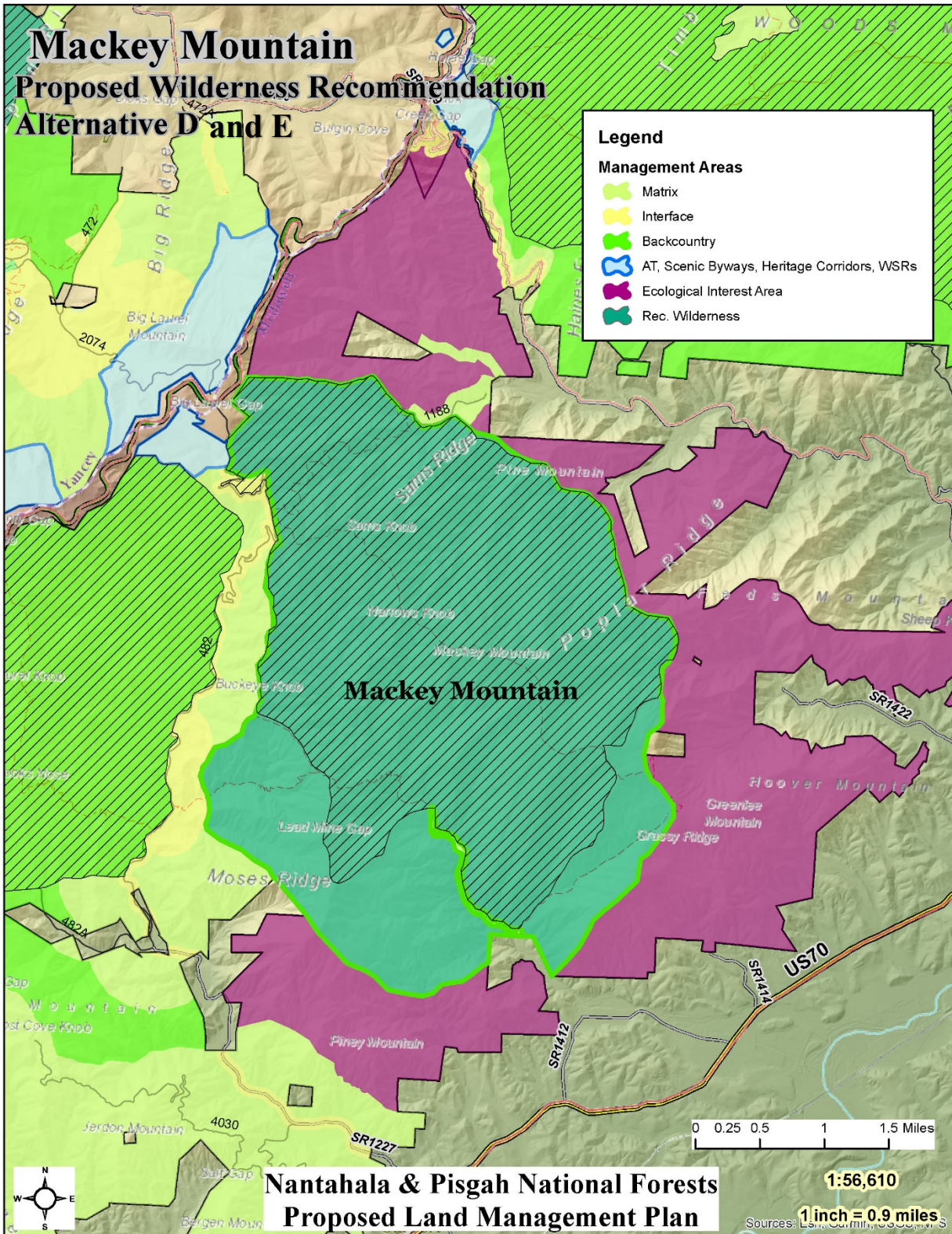
Miles of NFS trail managed for bicycle use: None

Acres of non-federal inholdings: None

Acres of outstanding or reserved mineral rights: 56

Consistent with the theme of Alternative D to only recommend areas with a high degree of wilderness characteristics, only the core Inventoried Roadless Area and some additional lands south of the IRA are recommended for wilderness. Alternatives D and E exclude the irregular fingers of federal ownership to the east, roads, and a private inholding to the north, and “cherry-stems” the municipal water intake and access road to the south with a 100-foot buffer. The resulting recommended area boundary is generally consolidated, making management to preserve wilderness characteristics more feasible. This boundary retains historic features as being part of the Weeks Act purchase, and is predominantly within a large old growth patch.





Middle Prong Wilderness Extension

Pisgah Ranger District / North Slope Geographic Area

Acres Evaluated: 6,676

Middle Prong Wilderness Extension lies north of Middle Prong Wilderness and includes a finger of federal ownership over seven miles long and less than 0.6 miles wide at its narrowest point. Due to the area shape, configuration, inclusion of NFS roads, and recent vegetation management, and adjacent land uses, the northern portion of this evaluation area has a low degree of wilderness characteristics.

However, the southern portion of the evaluation area within the Inventoried Roadless Area, and immediately adjacent to Middle Prong Wilderness, has a higher concentration of wilderness characteristics. This portion of the area has no recent vegetation management, no trails managed for mechanized use, has a natural appearance, and contains high-elevation spruce-fir forests, which are somewhat rare in the Southern Appalachian Mountains. There are three low maintenance level NFS roads in this area, but records indicate they have not been used for management since 1985. There are also two small wildlife fields along the boundary of this area which have little effect on wilderness characteristics.

Alternatives B & D

Acres Recommended: 1,871

Acres in Wilderness Study Area: None

Acres in Inventoried Roadless Area: 1,801

Miles of NFS roads (ML1 & 2): 4.0

Acres of vegetation management (< 20 years old): None

Acres of maintained wildlife fields: 0.9

Miles of NFS trail managed for bicycle use: None

Acres of non-federal inholdings: None

Acres of outstanding or reserved mineral rights: 1,871

The southern portion of the evaluation area which lies within the IRA boundary is recommended for wilderness designation in alternatives B and D. As an extension to Middle Prong Wilderness, this area has high quality wilderness characteristics and public support for recommendation from multiple wilderness advocacy groups and individuals.

Alternative C

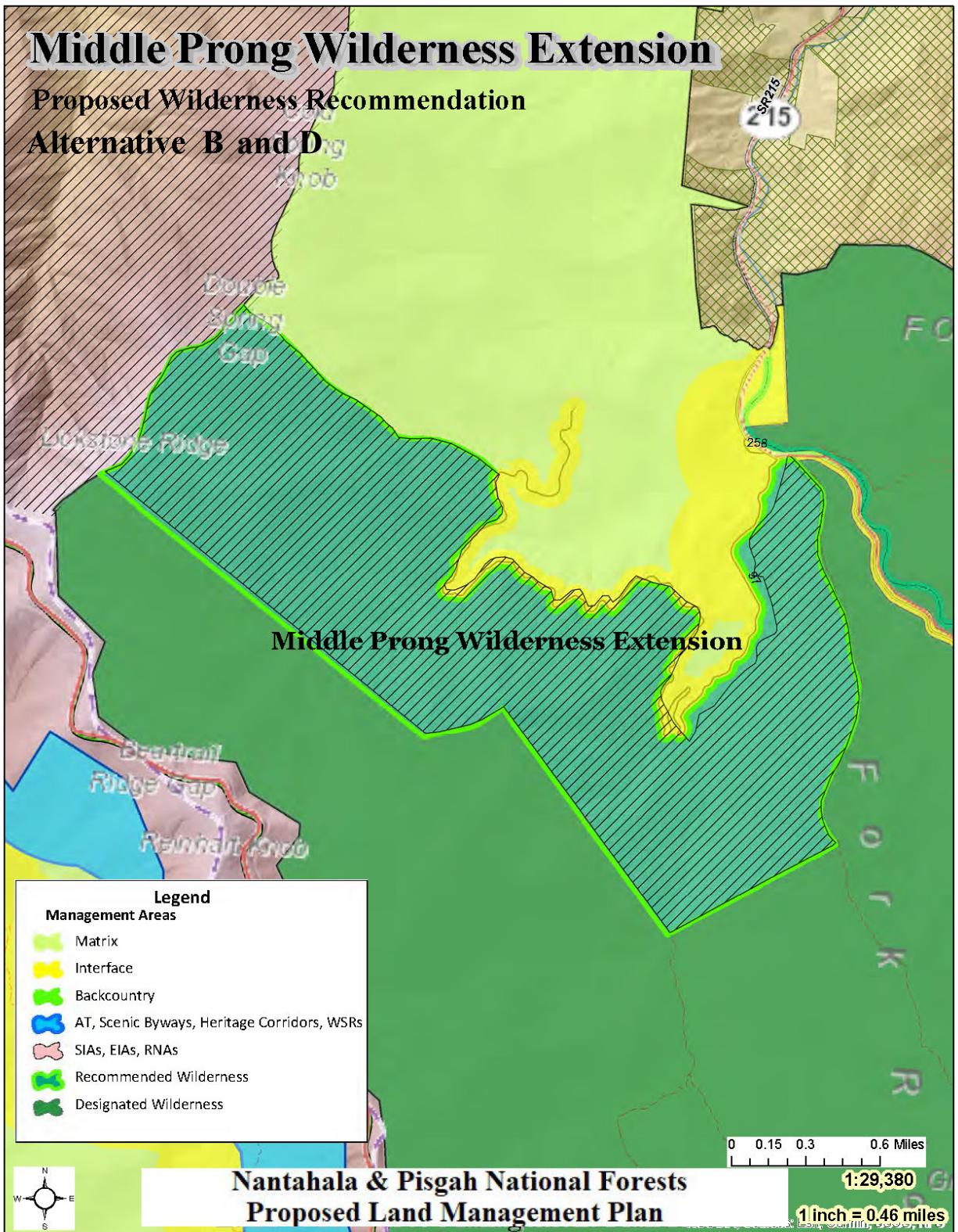
Acres Recommended: None

Consistent with the theme of Alternative C, this area is not recommended.

Alternative E (Preferred Alternative)

Acres Recommended: None

Although the Middle Prong extension has wilderness characteristics, it does contain four miles of NFS road, and there are potential opportunities for red spruce restoration at higher elevations. After consideration of the analysis and public comments, the Forest Supervisor decided not to recommend this area in Alternative E.



Overflow Creek

Nantahala Ranger District / Highland Domes Geographic Area

Acres Evaluated: 3,901

The Overflow Creek area has been managed to preserve wilderness characteristics, where they exist, since its designation by congress as a Wilderness Study Area in 1984. The area has locations where opportunities for solitude or primitive and unconfined recreation are available, but they are limited by the small size, area roads, and adjacent development. At only 3,901 acres, the Overflow Creek area is less than 5,000 acres. Furthermore, the area is almost entirely bisected by NFS road 79 which continues as a mowed linear wildlife opening for over two miles; this road through its core adversely affects naturalness, undeveloped characteristics, and opportunities for solitude or primitive and unconfined recreation within the area. A portion of the Blue Valley Experimental Forest overlaps with the designated Wilderness Study Area on the eastern boundary. There are also impacts to solitude from sights and sounds of surrounding development and the heavily trafficked NC Highway 106, as well as a high likelihood of encounters associated with visitation at area waterfalls and proximity to nearby resort communities. Highly developed trail structures and maintained wildlife openings detract from undeveloped and natural characteristics in the northeastern and central portions of the area; however, these impacts are largely confined to the immediate vicinity and are not pervasive throughout the area. When considered as a whole, these factors detract from wilderness characteristics overall, and affect manageability to preserve those characteristics in an unimpaired condition. Similar considerations contributed to the area not being recommended for wilderness designation in the 1994 LRMP.

Alternative B

Acres Recommended: 3,725

Acres in Wilderness Study Area: 3,248

Acres in Inventoried Roadless Area: 3,248 (Overlaps WSA)

Miles of NFS roads (ML1 & 2): There is 2.3 miles of ML3 NFS road, but no ML1 or 2 NFS roads

Acres of vegetation management (< 20 years old): None

Acres of maintained wildlife fields: 10.8

Miles of NFS trail managed for bicycle use: None

Acres of non-federal inholdings: None

Acres of outstanding or reserved mineral rights: None

A portion of the evaluation area is recommended in this alternative because of the moderate degree of wilderness characteristics the area possesses in certain locations, and public support for recommendation from wilderness advocacy groups and individuals. Recommended area boundaries in this alternative are driven by public comment, but overall wilderness characteristics are diminished by an open maintenance level 3 NFS road through the area, over 10 acres of maintained wildlife openings, and its small size which affects the ability to manage in an unimpaired condition.

Alternative C

Acres Recommended: None

Consistent with the theme of Alternative C, this area is not recommended.

Alternative D

Acres Recommended: None

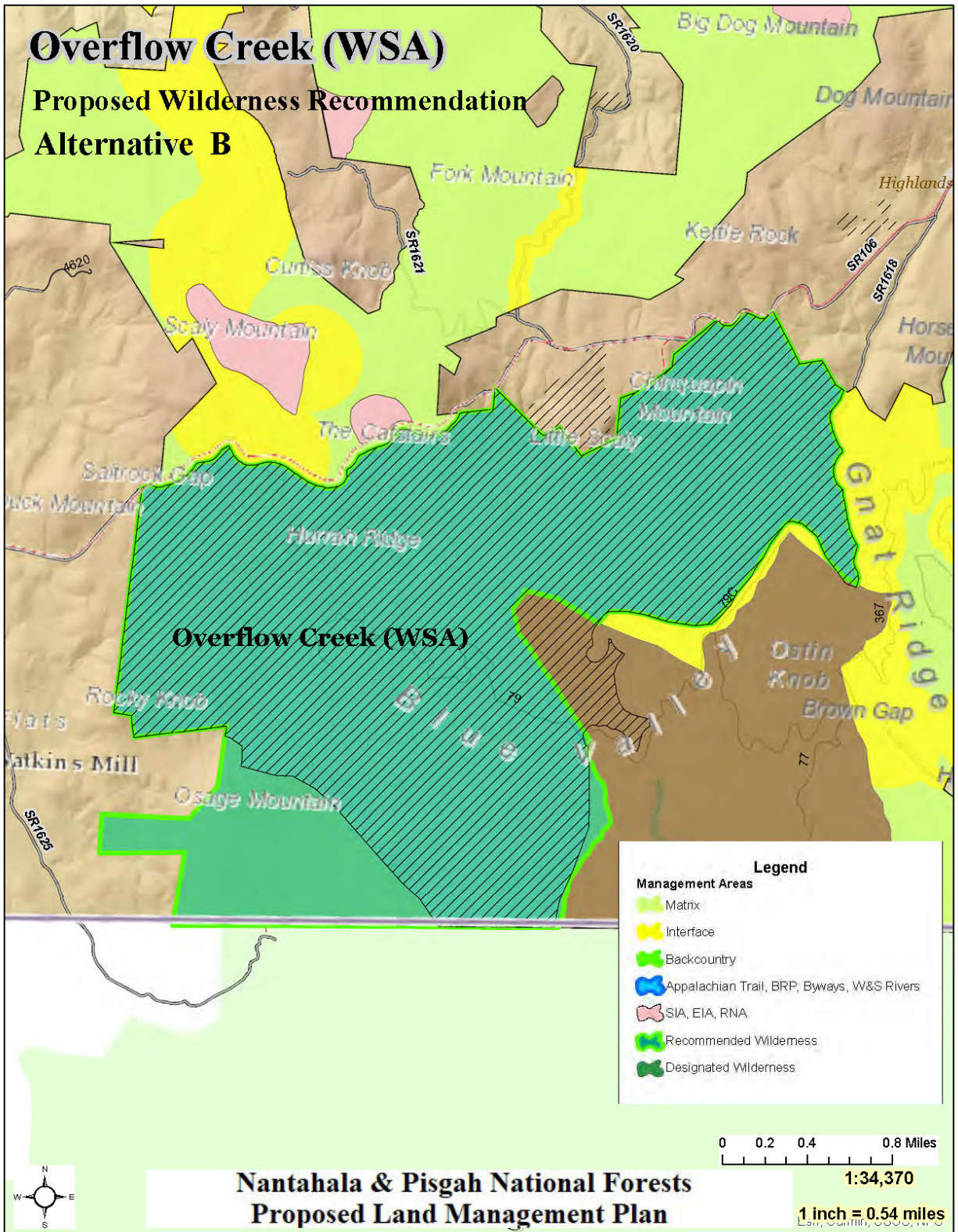
Consistent with the theme of Alternative D to only recommend areas with high quality wilderness characteristics, Overflow Creek area is not recommended for wilderness designation in this alternative.

As described above, the area is less than 5,000 acres, is almost entirely bisected by an open NFS road, contains highly developed trails, has high visitation to multiple waterfalls, has an adjacent heavily used highway overlooking the area, and has high-density residential development along many of its boundaries. These factors make the area difficult to manage for wilderness characteristics in an unimpaired condition. With the high likelihood of visitor encounters, apparent man-made modifications to the natural condition, sights and sounds of roads and development, and primitive recreation opportunities being confined to relatively small parcels of NFS lands, the visitor experience in Overflow Creek evaluation area is much like any other general forest area on the Nantahala or Pisgah NF.

Alternative E (Preferred Alternative)

Acres Recommended: None

For the reasons identified in the analysis of Alternative D, and after consideration of the analysis and public comments, the Forest Supervisor decided not to recommend this area in Alternative E.



Shining Rock Wilderness Extension – Dark Prong (Graveyard Ridge)

Pisgah Ranger District / North Slope Geographic Area

Acres Evaluated: 2,339

Within the Shining Rock Wilderness Extension - Graveyard Ridge evaluation area, the Graveyard Fields and Black Balsam locations are very popular recreation destinations accessed from the Blue Ridge Parkway and Black Balsam Road. These heavily used areas have highly developed trails in some locations to mitigate visitor impact to soils and waterways including boardwalks, gravel-surfacing, bridges, and observation platforms. There are also trails managed for bicycle use and seasonal motorized vehicular access. All of these features detract from the undeveloped and natural characteristics of the area. Opportunities for solitude are impacted by high visitor use, and sights and sounds of nearby roadways, especially the Blue Ridge Parkway. However, these impacts are concentrated at Black Balsam, Ivester Gap, and Graveyard Fields. Conversely, the Dark Prong drainage north of Graveyard Ridge, is topographically shielded from the sights and sounds of the Blue Ridge Parkway and Graveyard Fields. This portion of the evaluation area receives relatively little use and has trails managed only for hiking; it offers opportunities for solitude and retains its natural and undeveloped characteristics. The Dark Prong area is also immediately adjacent to Shining Rock Wilderness, and provides opportunities for primitive and unconfined recreation.

Alternatives B & D

Acres Recommended: 929

Acres in Wilderness Study Area: None

Acres in Inventoried Roadless Area: 916

Miles of NFS roads (ML1 & 2): None

Acres of vegetation management (< 20 years old): None

Acres of maintained wildlife fields: None

Miles of NFS trail managed for bicycle use: None

Acres of non-federal inholdings: None

Acres of outstanding or reserved mineral rights: 929

Recommendation of the Dark Prong portion of Shining Rock Wilderness Extension - Graveyard Ridge evaluation area is consistent with themes of both Alternatives B and D. The Dark Prong area contains high quality wilderness characteristics and has broad public support for recommendation from wilderness advocacy groups and individuals.

Alternative C

Acres Recommended: None

Consistent with the theme of Alternative C, this area is not recommended.

Alternative E (Preferred Alternative)

Acres Recommended: 939

Acres in Wilderness Study Area: None

Acres in Inventoried Roadless Area: 916

Miles of NFS roads (ML1 & 2): None

Acres of vegetation management (< 20 years old): None

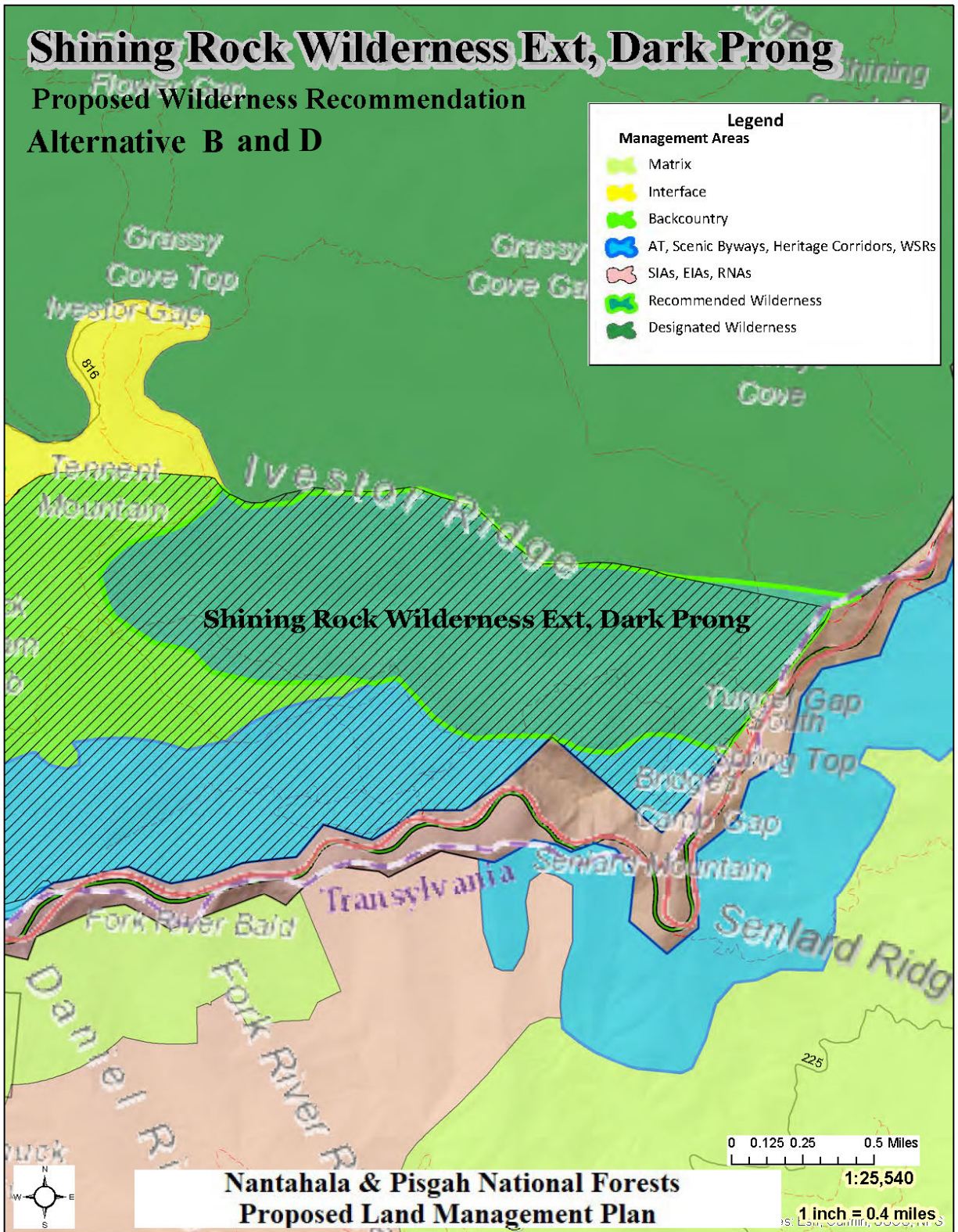
Acres of maintained wildlife fields: None

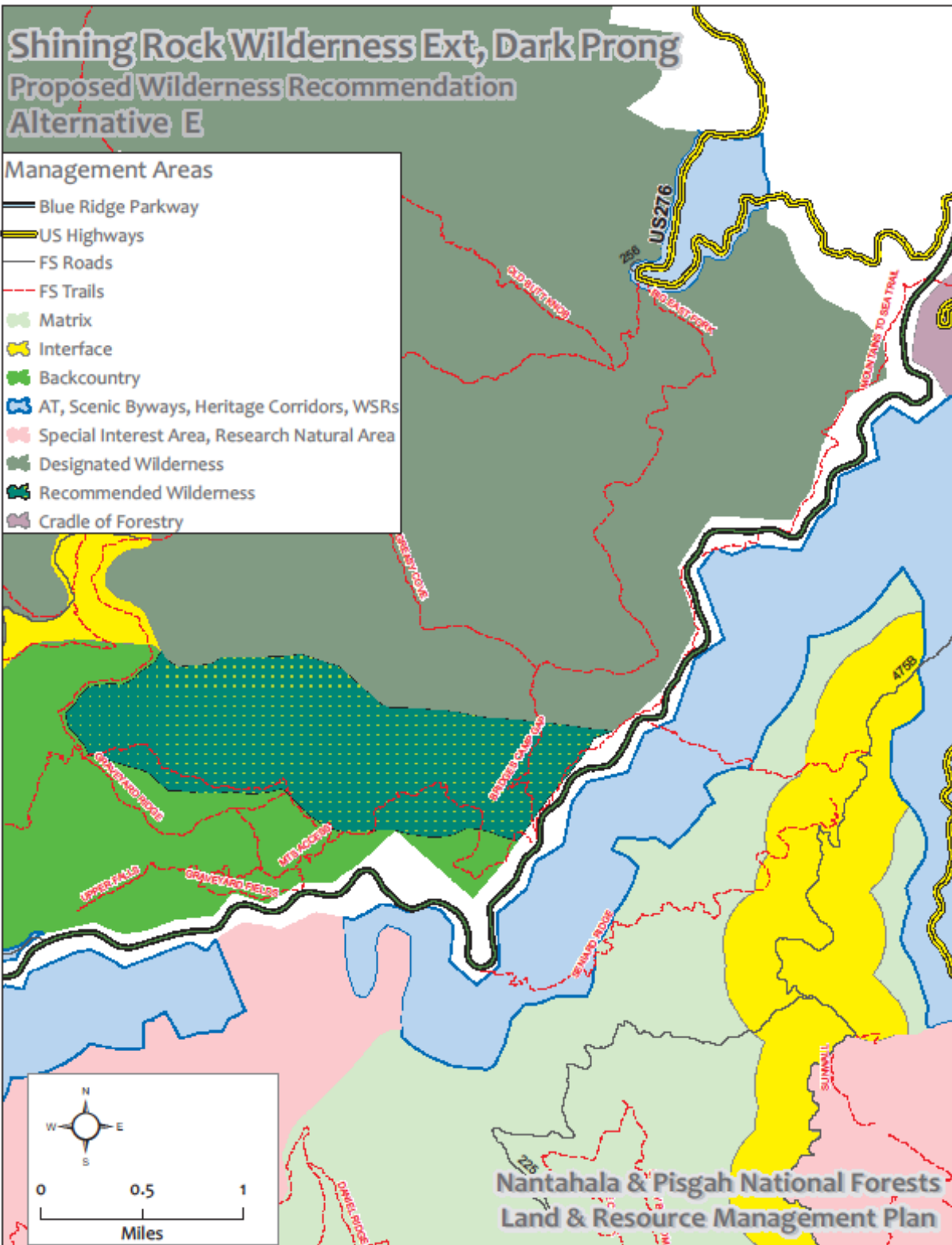
Miles of NFS trail managed for bicycle use: None

Acres of non-federal inholdings: None

Acres of outstanding or reserved mineral rights: 939

Alternative E recommends the Dark Prong Extension to the Shining Rock Wilderness. The Dark Prong area contains high quality wilderness characteristics and has broad public support for recommendation from wilderness advocacy groups and individuals. An additional 10 acres is being recommended in Alternative E to provide a 100-foot buffer from Graveyard Ridge Trail to the west and to adjust the southern boundary to conform to the ridgeline. The southern and western boundaries were adjusted to conform to terrain features and provide a consistent offset from Graveyard Ridge Trail (which is open to mountain bikes). This adjustment will improve boundary identification and management on the ground.





Shining Rock Wilderness Extension - Sam Branch (Sam Knob)

Pisgah Ranger District / North Slope Geographic Area

Acres Evaluated: 2,629

Much of the southern half of Shining Rock Wilderness Extension - Sam Knob evaluation area has evidence of human modification which affects the undeveloped and natural characteristics including maintained wildlife fields, highly developed trail structures, gravel trail surfacing, and a concrete trail bridge. The area also has trails managed for bicycle use (mechanized transport), which is inconsistent with the characteristic of primitive recreation. Opportunities for solitude are also impacted by high visitor use, and sights and sounds of vehicles on Black Balsam Road, NC215, the Blue Ridge Parkway, and the seasonally open Ivestor Gap Trail. However, the area north of Sam Knob, in the Sam Branch drainage, is topographically shielded from many of these impacts. The Sam Branch area is immediately adjacent to Shining Rock Wilderness, offers opportunities for solitude and primitive and unconfined recreation, and has more undeveloped and natural characteristics than areas to the south.

Alternatives B & D

Acres Recommended: 744

Acres in Wilderness Study Area: None

Acres in Inventoried Roadless Area: 737

Miles of NFS roads (ML1 & 2): None

Acres of vegetation management (< 20 years old): None

Acres of maintained wildlife fields: None

Miles of NFS trail managed for bicycle use: None

Acres of non-federal inholdings: None

Acres of outstanding or reserved mineral rights: 744

Recommendation of the Sam Branch portion of Shining Rock Wilderness Extension - Sam Knob evaluation area is consistent with the themes of both Alternatives B and D. The Sam Branch area contains high quality wilderness characteristics and has broad public support for recommendation from wilderness advocacy groups and individuals.

Alternative C

Acres Recommended: None

Consistent with the theme of Alternative C, this area is not recommended.

Alternative E (Preferred Alternative)

Acres Recommended: 688

Acres in Wilderness Study Area: None

Acres in Inventoried Roadless Area: 682

Miles of NFS roads (ML1 & 2): None

Acres of vegetation management (< 20 years old): None

Acres of maintained wildlife fields: None

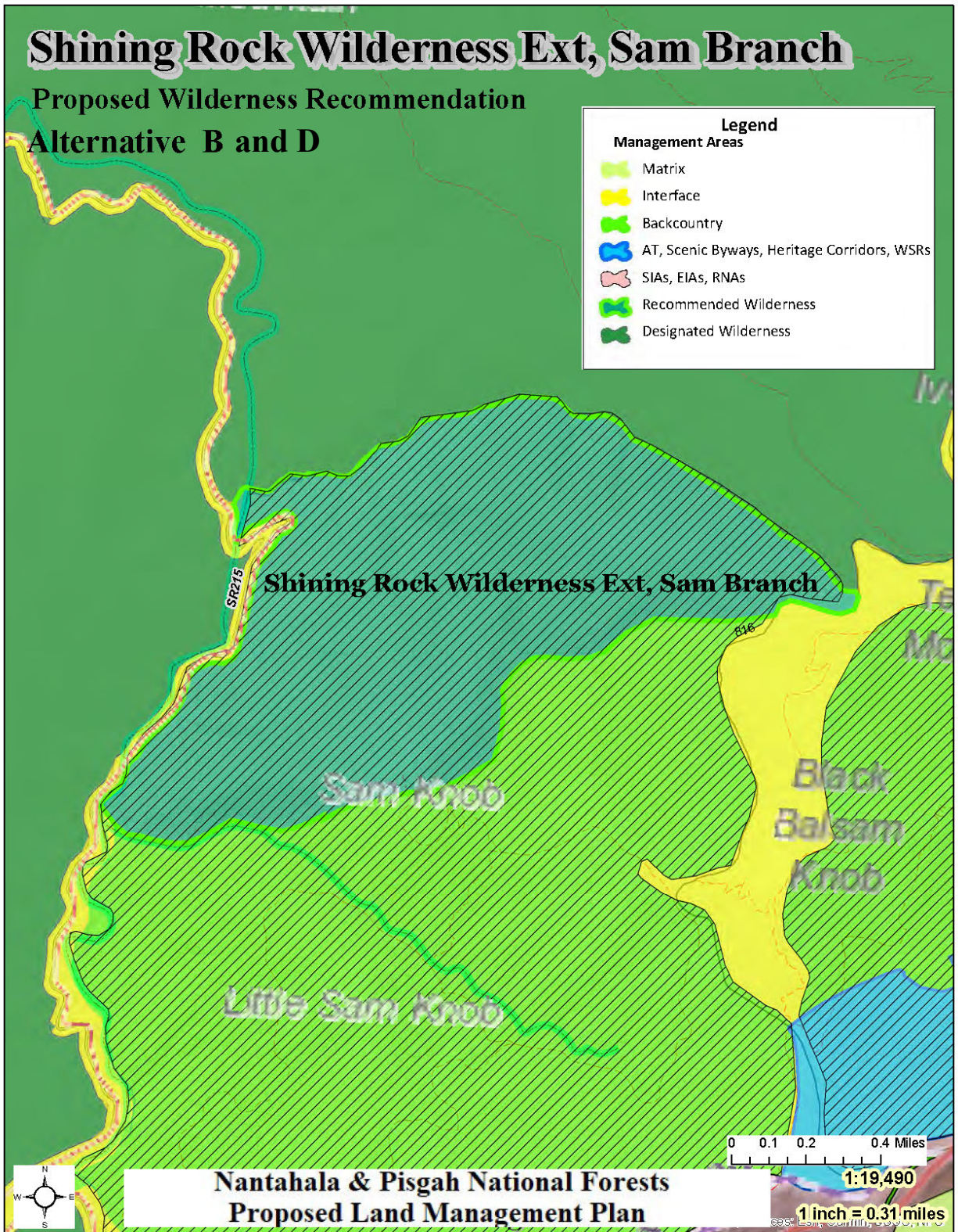
Miles of NFS trail managed for bicycle use: None

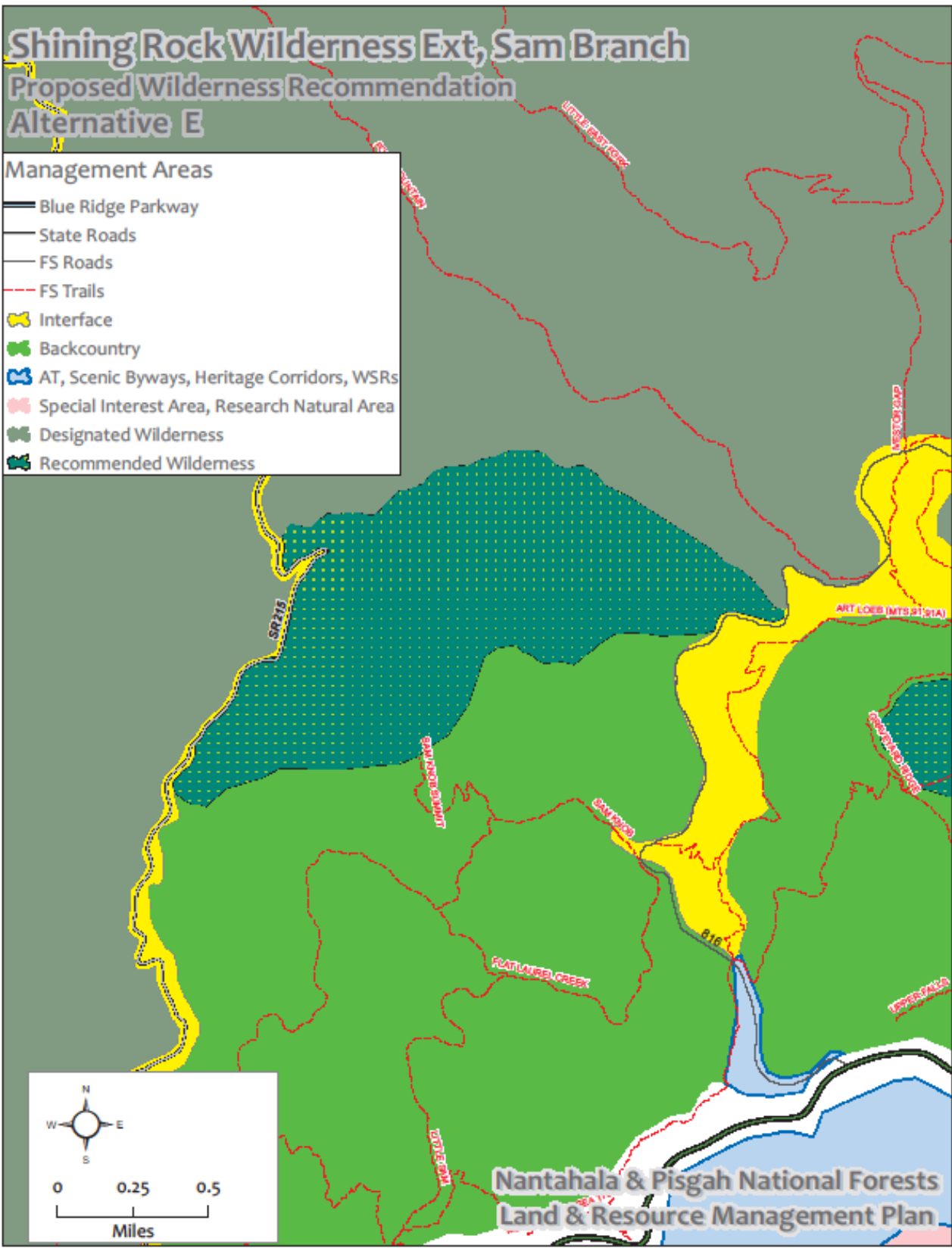
Acres of non-federal inholdings: None

Acres of outstanding or reserved mineral rights: 688

The Sam Branch area contains high quality wilderness characteristics and has broad public support for recommendation from wilderness advocacy groups and individuals. The boundary was adjusted slightly

from the area recommended in Alternatives B and D to follow terrain features and simplify boundary identification and management.





Snowbird

Cheoah Ranger District / Unicoi Mountains Geographic Area

Acres Evaluated: 11,560

The Snowbird evaluation area includes approximately 8,400 acres to the west which is a Wilderness Study Area/Inventoried Roadless Area, and approximately 3,100 acres to the east around Snowbird Road (NFSR 75). The eastern portion of the evaluation area has many miles of NFS roads, recent timber management, and maintained wildlife fields. It is also completely bisected by the open NFS Road 75, which has dispersed developed campsites, a vault toilet, a concrete road bridge, and heavy visitation during trout fishing season. These developed and unnatural features occur in various locations across the area's eastern portion, which does not possess wilderness characteristics. There are no NFS trails within the WSA boundary designated for motorized or mountain bike use; however, illegal OHV use is occurring on Mitchell Lick Trail (TR154) and King Meadows Trail (TR63).

The western part of this evaluation area is predominately natural appearing and undeveloped; and has opportunities for solitude, and for primitive and unconfined recreation. Generally, this portion of the area has been managed to preserve its wilderness characteristics since designation by congress as a Wilderness Study Area in 1984. The area was also identified as an Inventoried Roadless Area in 2001. All trails within the WSA are managed as hike-only, and the area receives relatively little use. However, there are some features within the WSA that negatively affect undeveloped and natural characteristics such as maintained wildlife fields, illegal OHV use on trails along the periphery, and a ML1 NFS road near the WSA eastern boundary. There is also a steel truss footbridge on King Meadows Trail near the WSA eastern boundary and "The Junction" trailhead on NFSR 75. Although these features detract from the natural and undeveloped characteristics in their immediate vicinities, they have little effect to the area's overall quality of wilderness characteristics. Although the Snowbird WSA was found to possess wilderness characteristics in the 1987 LRMP EIS analysis, it was not recommended in the record of decision for the current LRMP as amended in 1994.

Alternatives B, C, and D

Acres Recommended: 8,481

Acres in Wilderness Study Area: 8,481

Acres in Inventoried Roadless Area: 8,365

Miles of NFS roads (ML1 & 2): 2.5

Acres of vegetation management (< 20 years old): None

Acres of maintained wildlife fields: 1.8

Miles of NFS trail managed for bicycle use: None

Acres of non-federal inholdings: None

Acres of outstanding or reserved mineral rights: None

Recommendation of the WSA portion of Snowbird evaluation area for wilderness designation is consistent with themes of Alternatives B, C, and D, because of its high-quality wilderness characteristics, and support for recommendation. Support for recommending this area has been expressed by wilderness advocates as well as those who prefer recommending areas that have already been managed for wilderness characteristics rather than new locations. If considered for wilderness designation by congress, a more detailed review would be conducted of non-conforming features, their potential decommissioning and restoration to a natural condition, or boundary adjustments to exclude these features.

Alternative E (Preferred Alternative)

Acres Recommended: 8,335

Acres in Wilderness Study Area: 8,299

Acres in Inventoried Roadless Area: 8,299

Miles of NFS roads (ML1 & 2): 1.2

Acres of vegetation management (< 20 years old): None

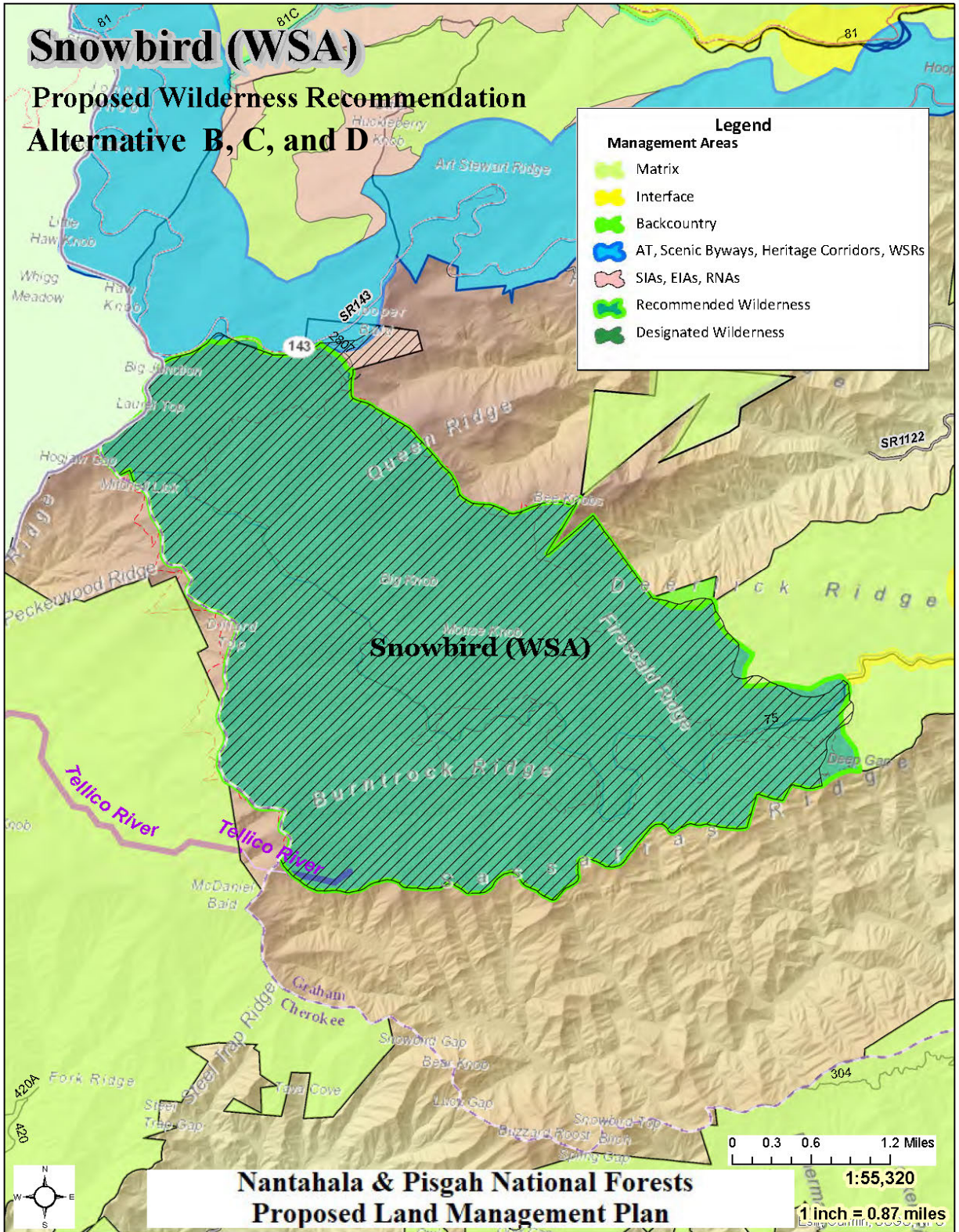
Acres of maintained wildlife fields: 1.4

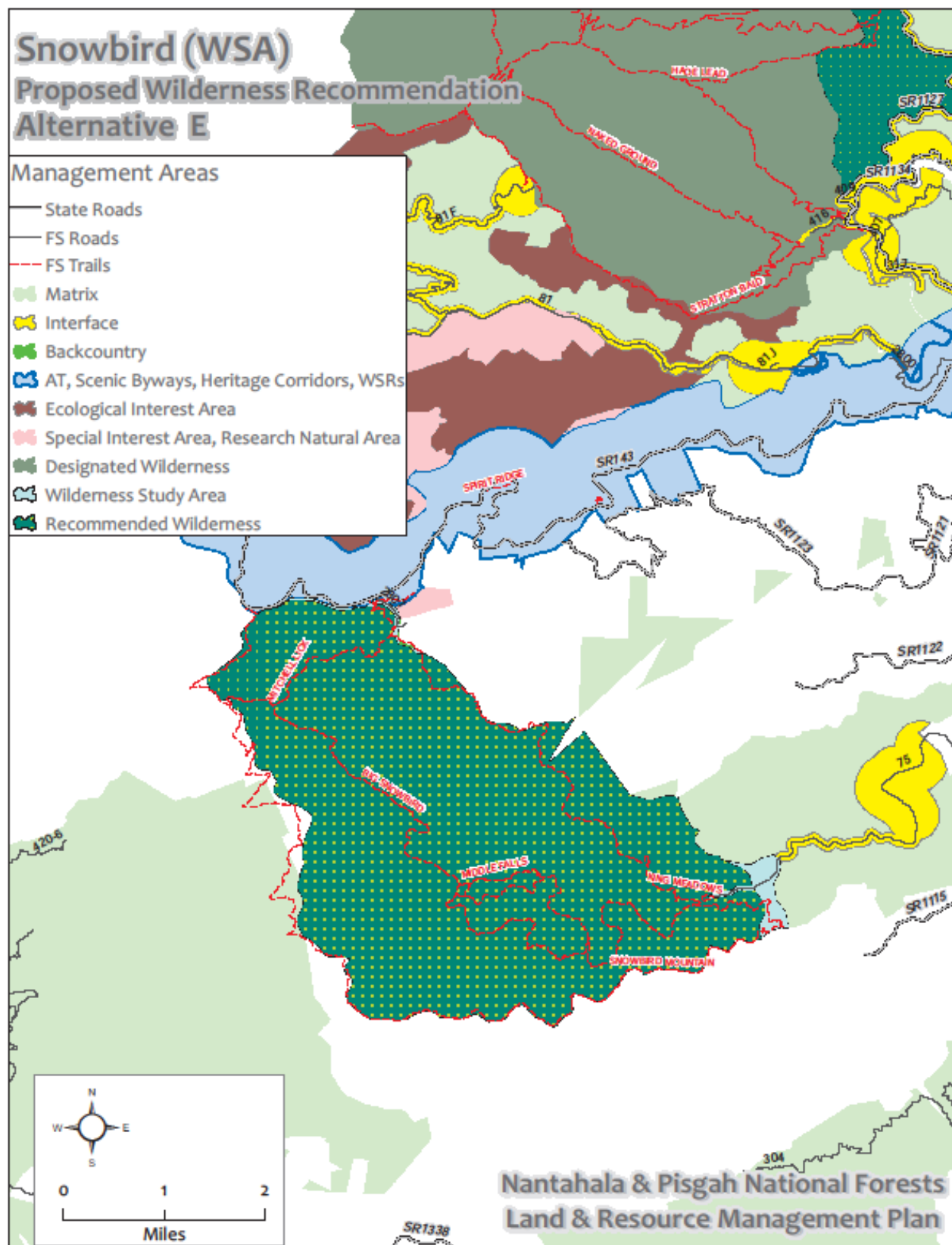
Miles of NFS trail managed for bicycle use: None

Acres of non-federal inholdings: None

Acres of outstanding or reserved mineral rights: None

Alternative E recommends the Snowbird Wilderness Study Area with a few minor adjustments to the area boundary. The area has high quality wilderness characteristics and has been managed to preserve those characteristics since designation by Congress as a Wilderness Study Area in 1984. Support for recommending this area has been expressed by wilderness advocates as well as those who prefer recommending areas that have already been managed for wilderness characteristics rather than new areas. The area being recommended for wilderness in Alternative E excludes a buffer around NFS Road 2807 at Hooper Bald and NFS Road 75 near the Junction Trailhead, both of which are open roads. Boundaries were also adjusted to exclude King Meadows Trail steel truss bridge to the south, a severely eroded section of King Meadows Trail to the north, and to conform with topographic features along the northern, eastern, and southeastern boundaries.





Southern Nantahala Wilderness Extension - East

January 2023 Note: This area was renamed in the final Plan and EIS Alternative E Modified. It was formerly known as Southern Nantahala Wilderness Extension – Barker's Creek.

Nantahala Ranger District / Nantahala Mountains Geographic Area

Acres Evaluated: 1,556

This evaluation area is adjacent to the east side of Southern Nantahala Wilderness. A portion of the evaluation area immediately adjacent to the existing wilderness is also identified as an Inventoried Roadless Area. The evaluation area contains no NFS roads, NFS trails managed for motorized-use or mechanized transport, developed features, wildlife habitat improvements, or recent vegetation management; therefore, natural and undeveloped characteristics exist across the entire area. To the southeast, a peninsula of private lands extending into the evaluation area at Commissioner's Creek could affect opportunities for solitude and manageability for primitive and unconfined recreation, which drops this non-IRA portion of the evaluation area to a moderate degree of wilderness characteristics. However, the centrally located "Long Ridge" shields the western portion of the evaluation area from sights and sounds of civilization in Commissioner's Creek. This ridge is also the eastern boundary of the IRA. While this evaluation area is less than 5,000 acres in size, management to preserve wilderness characteristics would be possible as an extension to Southern Nantahala Wilderness. This is especially true west of Long Ridge in the IRA, where there is a high degree of wilderness characteristics.

Alternative B

Acres Recommended: 1,220

Acres in Wilderness Study Area: None

Acres in Inventoried Roadless Area: 974

Miles of NFS roads (ML1 & 2): None

Acres of vegetation management (< 20 years old): None

Acres of maintained wildlife fields: None

Miles of NFS trail managed for bicycle use: None

Acres of non-federal inholdings: None

Acres of outstanding or reserved mineral rights: None

A portion of the inventory area was included in Alternative B because the area contains a moderate to high degree of wilderness characteristics, and had public support for recommendation. The recommended area boundary in this alternative was driven by public comment, and includes lands east of the IRA boundary, adjacent to private lands around Commissioner's Creek.

Alternative C

Acres Recommended: None

Consistent with the theme of Alternative C, this area is not recommended.

Alternative D

Acres Recommended: 1,000

Acres in Wilderness Study Area: None

Acres in Inventoried Roadless Area: 974

Miles of NFS roads (ML1 & 2): None

Acres of vegetation management (< 20 years old): None

Acres of maintained wildlife fields: None

Miles of NFS trail managed for bicycle use: None

Acres of non-federal inholdings: None

Acres of outstanding or reserved mineral rights: None

In alternative D, only the portion of the evaluation area west of Long Ridge is recommended for wilderness designation as an extension to Southern Nantahala Wilderness. This IRA portion of the evaluation area has a higher degree of wilderness characteristics due to lower potential affects to solitude from nearby roads and private lands to the east, and improved manageability for primitive and unconfined recreation with a more consolidated boundary configuration.

Alternative E (Preferred Alternative)

Acres Recommended: 998

Acres in Wilderness Study Area: None

Acres in Inventoried Roadless Area: 973

Miles of NFS roads (ML1 & 2): None

Acres of vegetation management (< 20 years old): None

Acres of maintained wildlife fields: None

Miles of NFS trail managed for bicycle use: None

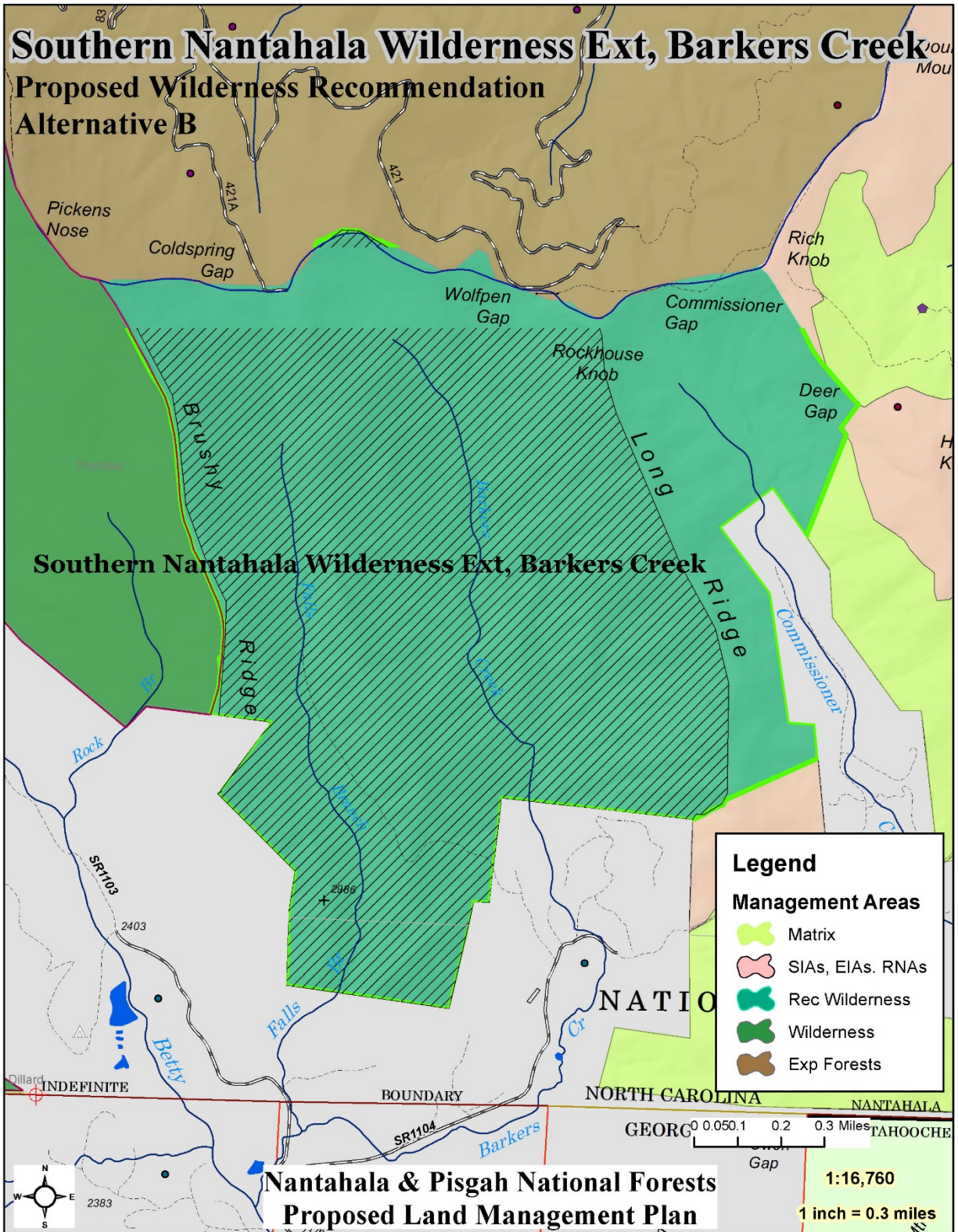
Acres of non-federal inholdings: None

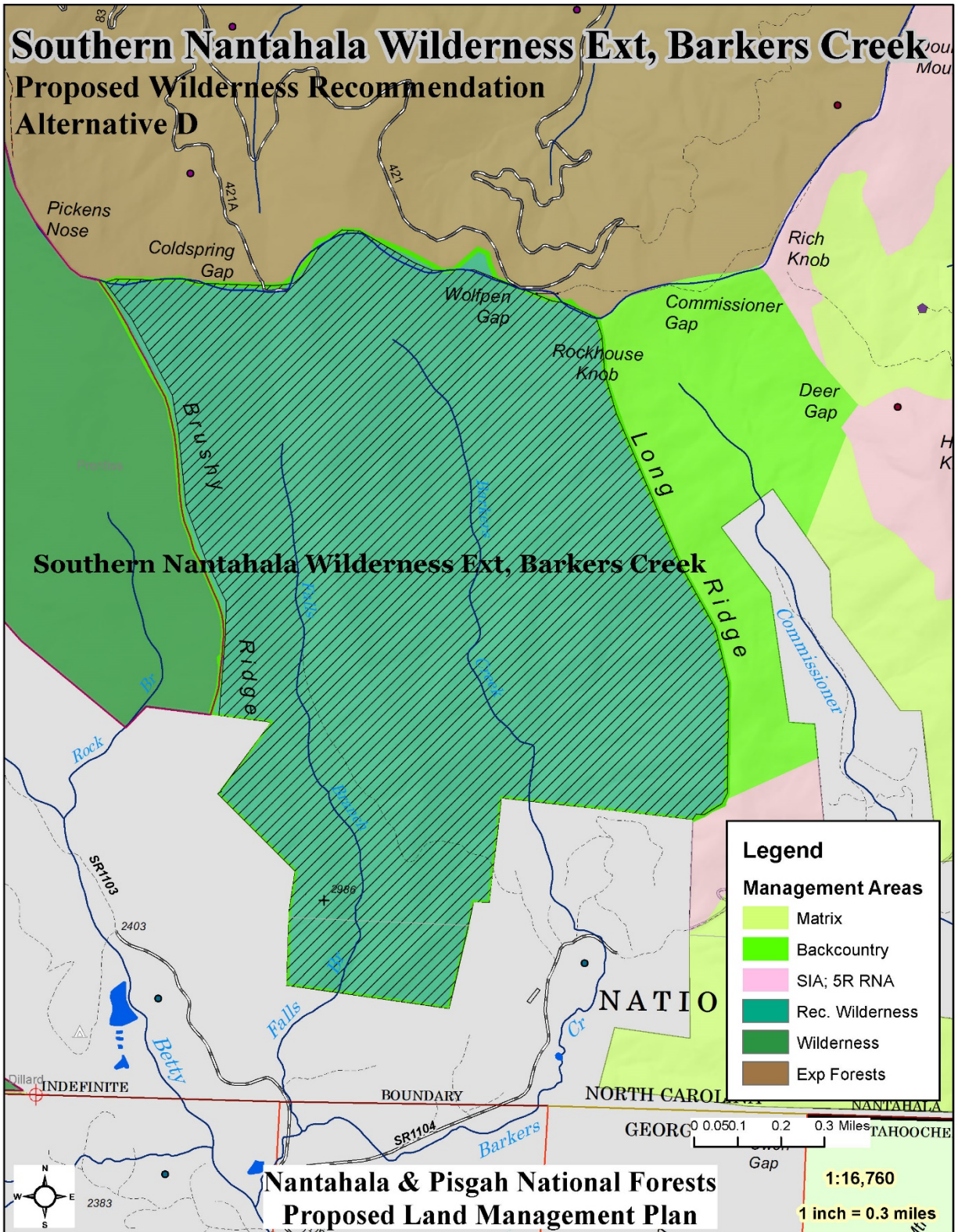
Acres of outstanding or reserved mineral rights: None

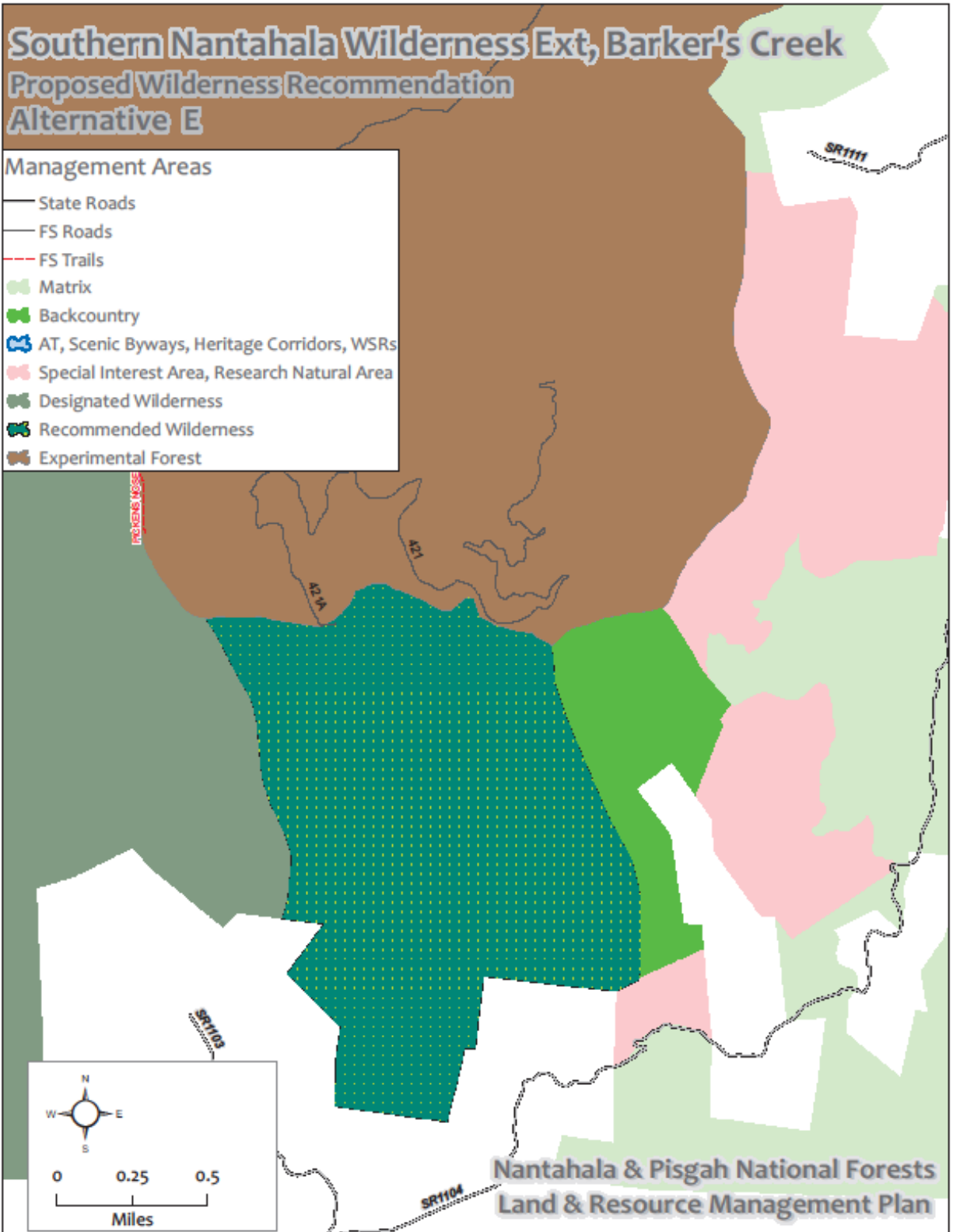
In Alternative E, only the portion of the evaluation area west of Long Ridge is recommended for wilderness designation as an extension to Southern Nantahala Wilderness. This IRA portion of the evaluation area has a higher degree of wilderness characteristics due to lower potential affects to solitude from nearby roads and private lands to the east and improved manageability for primitive and unconfined recreation with a more consolidated boundary configuration. The northern boundary was realigned slightly from Alternative D to exclude a buffer along adjacent roads in the Coweeta Experimental Forest.

Alternative E Modified

Same as Alternative E. This area was renamed to Southern Nantahala Wilderness Extension - East.







Southern Nantahala Wilderness Extension – Central

January 2023 Note: This area was renamed in the final Plan and EIS Alternative E Modified. It was formerly known as Southern Nantahala Wilderness Extension – Indian Ridge (Trail Ridge).

Nantahala Ranger District / Nantahala Mountains Geographic Area

Acres Evaluated: 4,298

This Southern Nantahala Wilderness Extension evaluation area lies adjacent to Southern Nantahala Wilderness to the northwest, north, northeast, and east. The evaluation area is bounded by NFSR 71 to the west; Standing Indian Campground to the north; and NFSR 67 and Hurricane Horse Camp to the east; all of which are closed during winter months. All trails within the area are managed for hiking or equestrian use. Gated NFS roads are open to bicycles (unless signed as closed), and some are maintained as linear wildlife openings or used to access wildlife fields on a recurring basis.

The degree of wilderness characteristics in this evaluation area are best analyzed by subdividing it into three sections: 1) to the northwest and north, in the Kimsey Creek and Park Ridge vicinity; 2) to the northeast, including Little Indian Creek, Little Indian IRA, and Nichols Branch; and 3) the eastern section including Big Indian IRA, Scream Ridge, and Yellow Patch Branch. Each of the three sections have varying concentrations of features which detract from wilderness characteristics. The degree to which each section possess wilderness characteristics is discussed below.

In the Kimsey Creek and Park Ridge section, there are popular hiking trails leading from the adjacent Kimsey Creek Group Campground and Standing Indian Campground. These trails are often used by groups of people staying in the campgrounds, which could impact opportunities for solitude. There are several miles of ML1 and 2 NFS roads, many acres of wildlife fields, linear wildlife openings, and recent vegetation management. The Kimsey Creek and Park Ridge locations are actively managed for timber and wildlife habitat improvements. These features negatively affect the area's natural and undeveloped characteristics, and subdivide it into small parcels limiting opportunities for primitive and unconfined recreation. Overall, this section of the evaluation area has a very low degree of wilderness characteristics.

The Little Indian Creek section includes the Little Indian IRA, and non-IRA lands in the Nichols Branch drainage. This section also has an ML1 NFS road, wildlife fields, linear wildlife openings, and a trail segment used to access wildlife fields. These features detract from undeveloped and natural characteristics and are distributed to the north, east, and south within this section of the evaluation area. This section is also adjacent to Hurricane Creek Horse Camp and NFSR 67, sights and sounds of which could affect opportunities for solitude. This is especially true on the eastern slope of Middle Trail Ridge, which offers little topographic screening from the adjacent road and campground. Even with these negative effects, this section of the evaluation area provides a moderate degree of wilderness characteristics.

The eastern section is comprised of Big Indian IRA, which extends from Upper Trail Ridge to Scream Ridge. This section also includes the non-IRA lands in the Yellow Patch Branch drainage. Within the IRA there is a linear wildlife opening to the north, and three small wildlife fields and a ML1 NFS road to the southeast. In the non-IRA Yellow Patch Branch drainage, there are additional ML1 NFS roads and linear wildlife openings. All of these features affect natural and undeveloped characteristics. To some degree opportunities for solitude may be affected by vehicular use on NFSR 67, but topography shields much of this area from the seasonally open road. With the distribution of detracting features and topographic screening of the adjacent road, the eastern section of the evaluation area has a moderate to high degree of wilderness characteristics.

Alternative B

Acres Recommended: 2,092

Acres in Wilderness Study Area: None

Acres in Inventoried Roadless Area: 1,310

Miles of NFS roads (ML1 & 2): 1.3

Acres of vegetation management (< 20 years old): None

Acres of maintained wildlife fields: 7.7

Miles of NFS trail managed for bicycle use: None

Acres of non-federal inholdings: None

Acres of outstanding or reserved mineral rights: None

A portion of the evaluation area is recommended in this alternative, including the southern part of Little Indian IRA on the eastern slopes of Middle Trail Ridge, Nichols Branch, all of Big Indian IRA, and Yellow Patch Branch. Recommendation of area is supported by wilderness advocacy groups and individuals, and its boundaries are driven by public comment. Although this area contains several detracting features and potential impacts to solitude, as described above, it does retain a moderate degree of wilderness characteristics overall.

Alternative C

Acres Recommended: None

Consistent with the theme of Alternative C, this area is not recommended.

Alternative D

Acres Recommended: 1,660

Acres in Wilderness Study Area: None

Acres in Inventoried Roadless Area: 1,125

Miles of NFS roads (ML1 & 2): 1.3

Acres of vegetation management (< 20 years old): None

Acres of maintained wildlife fields: 5.3

Miles of NFS trail managed for bicycle use: None

Acres of non-federal inholdings: None

Acres of outstanding or reserved mineral rights: None

Alternative D recommends a smaller section of the evaluation area than Alternative B, by excluding the eastern slopes of Middle Trail Ridge, and wildlife fields and mowing access routes near Nichols Branch and Upper Trail Ridge. The remaining section of the evaluation area includes Big Indian IRA, Scream Ridge, and Yellow Patch Branch. Although there are ML1 NFS roads and wildlife fields around Yellow Patch Branch which negatively affect undeveloped and natural characteristics, most of the recommended area is topographically shielded from NFSR 67 and offers greater opportunities for solitude. Overall, this section of the evaluation area has a moderate to high degree of wilderness characteristics.

Alternative E (Preferred Alternative)

Acres Recommended: 1,052

Acres in Wilderness Study Area: None

Acres in Inventoried Roadless Area: 1,024

Miles of NFS roads (ML1 & 2): None

Acres of vegetation management (< 20 years old): None

Acres of maintained wildlife fields: None

Miles of NFS trail managed for bicycle use: None

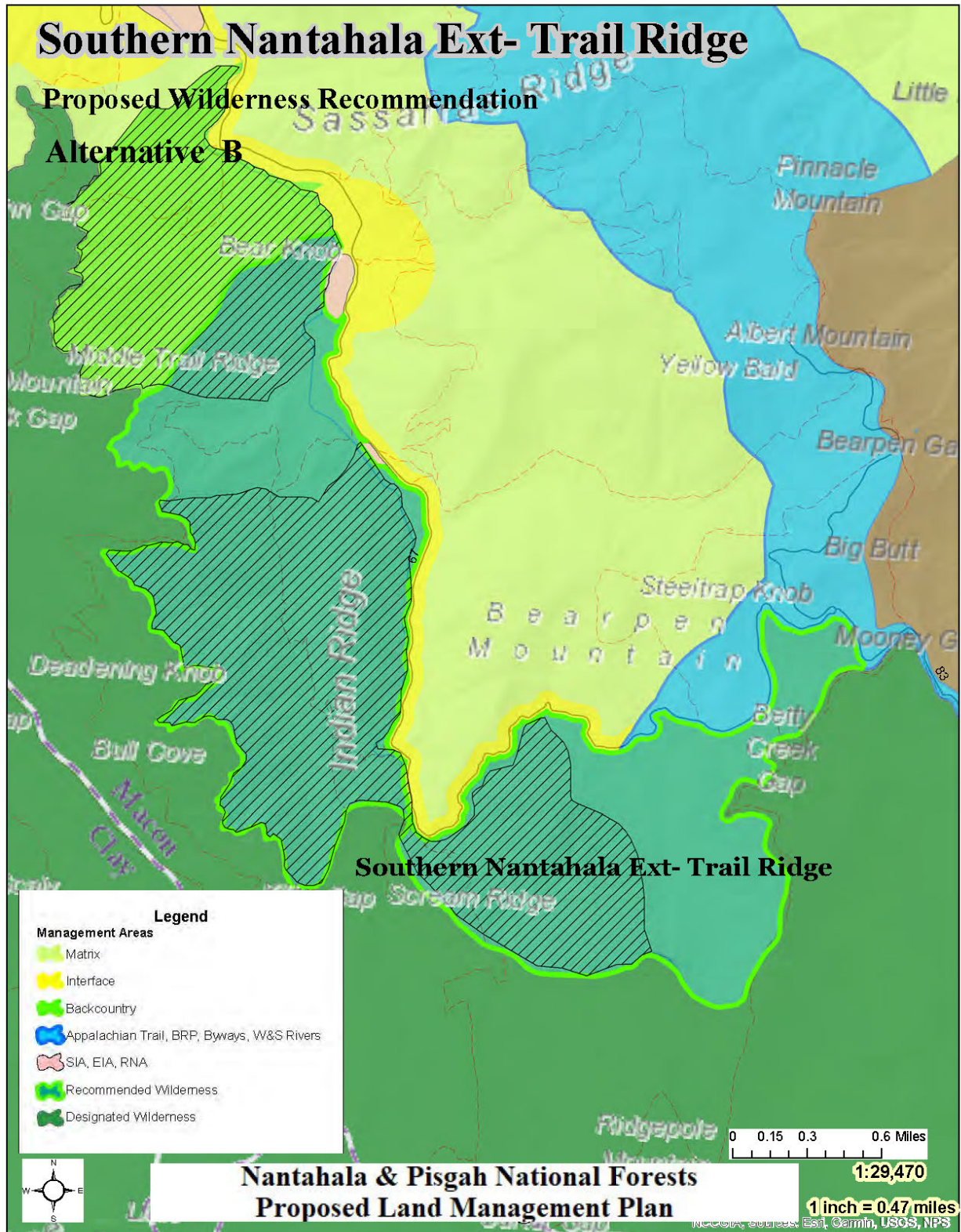
Acres of non-federal inholdings: None

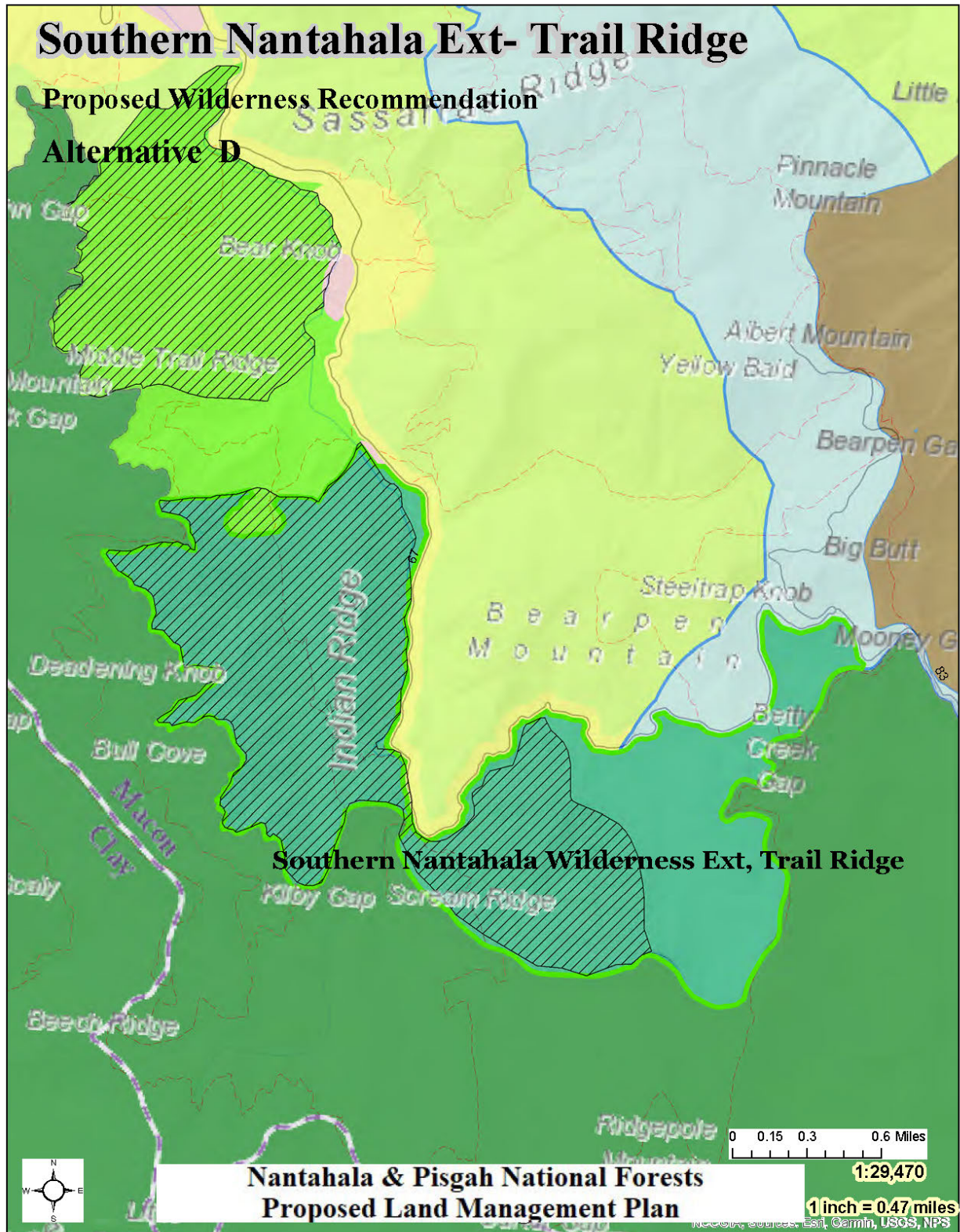
Acres of outstanding or reserved mineral rights: None

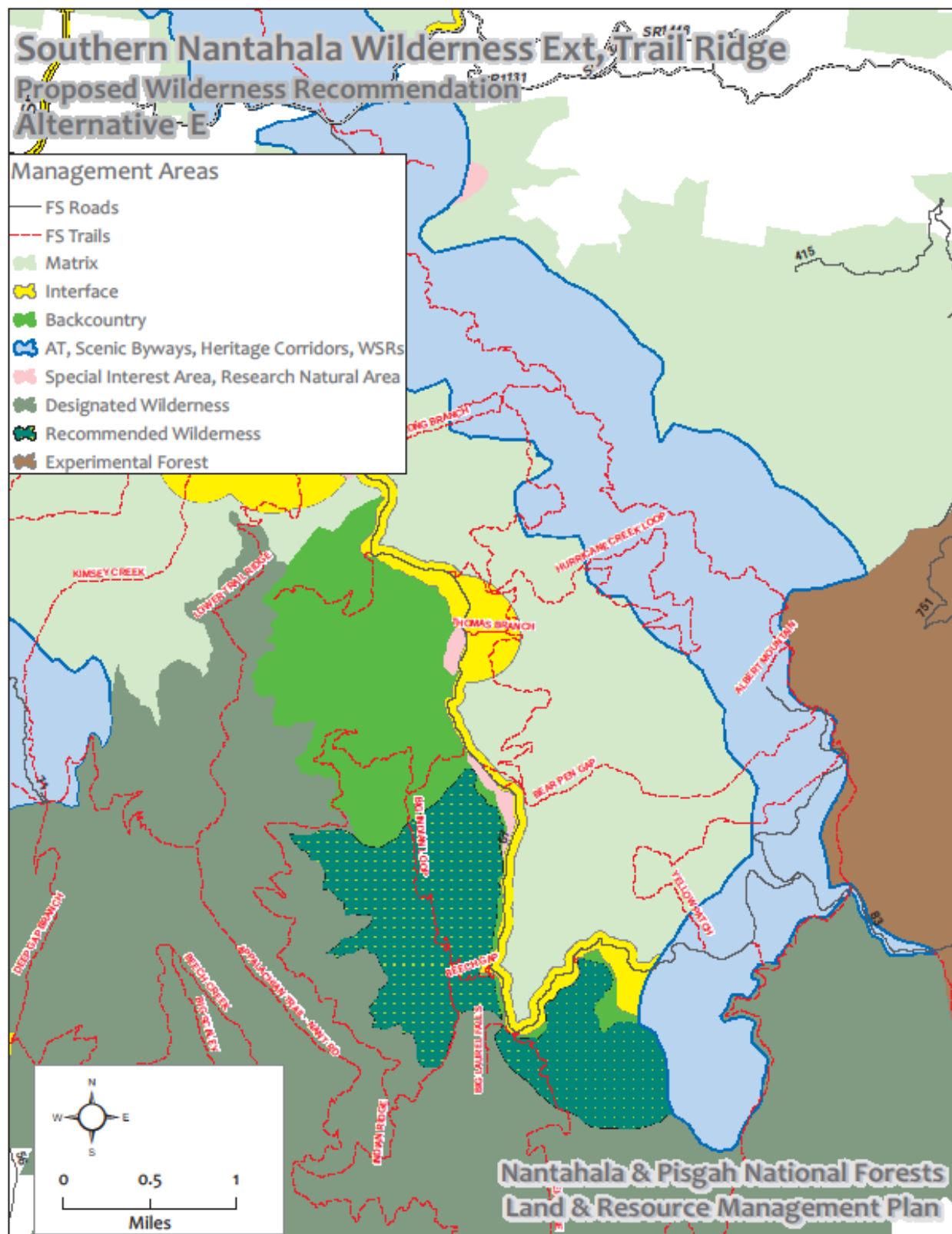
The area recommended for wilderness in Alternative E is primarily within the IRA but excludes NFS roads and wildlife openings to the north and east that were included in the area analyzed in Alternative D. Several boundaries were also adjusted to follow topographic features or exclude road buffers. Acres outside of the IRA were added along the southern boundary with an adjustment to include gaps between the IRA and the Southern Nantahala Wilderness boundary.

Alternative E Modified

Same as Alternative E. This area was renamed to Southern Nantahala Wilderness Extension - Central.







Southern Nantahala Wilderness Extension - Cherry Cove

Tusquitee Ranger District / Nantahala Mountains Geographic Area

Acres Evaluated: 1,159

Much of the Cherry Cove area has a natural appearance and there are opportunities for primitive recreation; however, solitude and unconfined recreation are limited due to the boundary configuration and adjacent land uses along three narrow protrusions. There are outstanding or reserved subsurface mineral rights within the western protrusion. Although the area is relatively small, it would be considered as an extension to the Southern Nantahala Wilderness. Within the portion identified as Inventoried Roadless Area, more solitude is possible and recreation is less confined, however, even this portion of the area contains views of development which impact solitude.

Alternative B

Acres Recommended: 1,159

Acres in Wilderness Study Area: None

Acres in Inventoried Roadless Area: 820

Miles of NFS roads (ML1 & 2): None

Acres of vegetation management (< 20 years old): None

Acres of maintained wildlife fields: None

Miles of NFS trail managed for bicycle use: None

Acres of non-federal inholdings: None

Acres of outstanding or reserved mineral rights: 83

Due to a natural character across much of the area, and some opportunities for solitude in hidden coves and along the SNW boundary, Cherry Cove has a moderate degree of wilderness characteristics. Most of the inventory area was included in Alternative B because of these characteristics, and the area had public support for recommendation from some wilderness advocacy groups. The recommended area boundary in this alternative was driven by public comment.

Alternative C

Acres Recommended: None

Consistent with the theme of Alternative C, this area is not recommended.

Alternative D

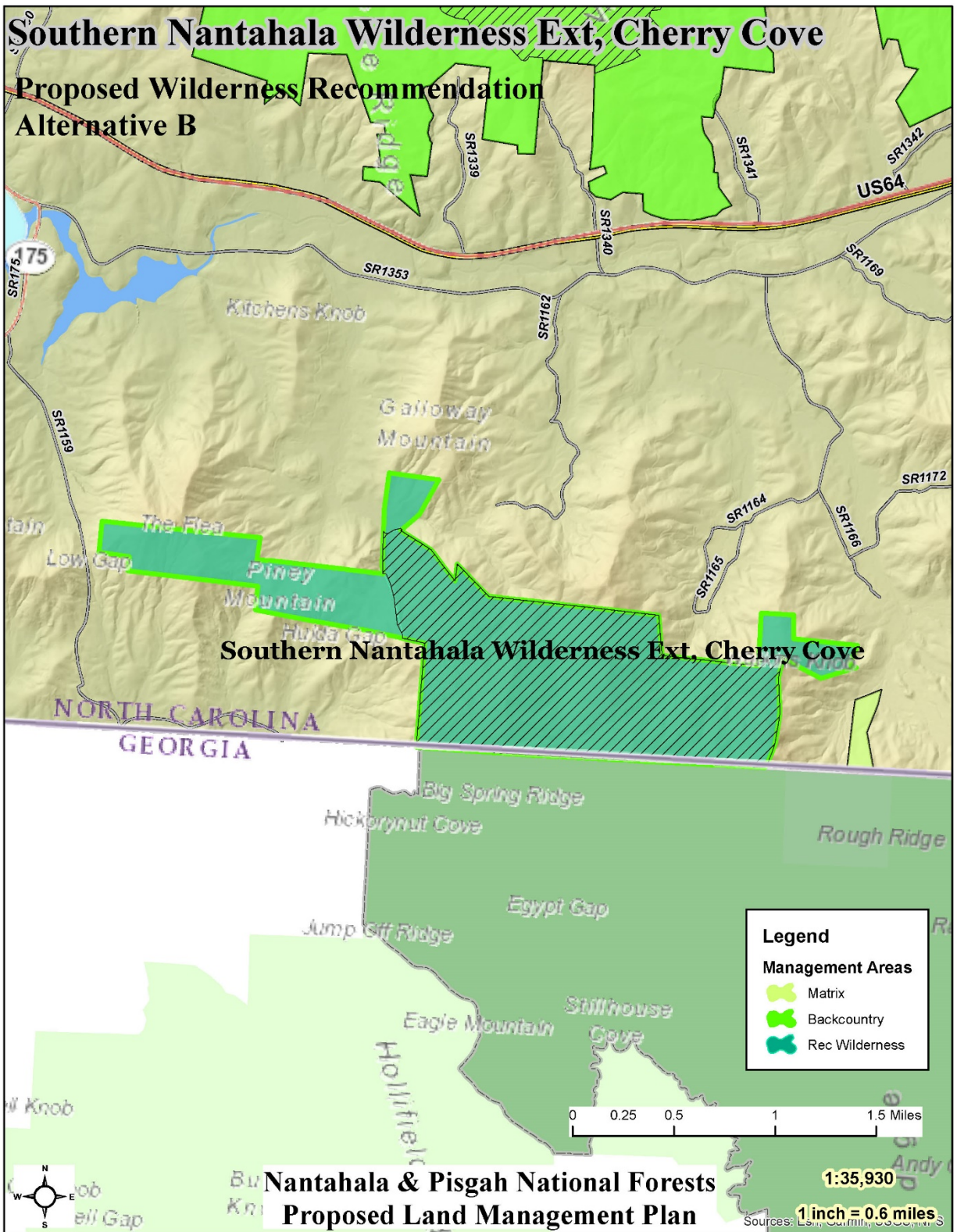
Acres Recommended: None

While parts of the evaluation area do offer a natural appearance and some opportunities for solitude, narrow protrusions confine the potential for primitive recreation and affect manageability to preserve wilderness characteristics. There are views of adjacent private development to the north and west; some of which are immediately adjacent to area boundaries. Outstanding or reserved subsurface mineral rights within the area could also affect manageability. This area was not recommended in Alternative D because it does not contain a high degree of wilderness characteristics compared to other recommended areas in this alternative.

Alternative E (Preferred Alternative)

Acres Recommended: None

As described in Alternative D, this area does not contain a high degree of wilderness characteristics and would be difficult to manage as wilderness due to the small size and narrow fingers of ownership. After consideration of the analysis and public comments, the Forest Supervisor decided not to recommend this area in Alternative E.



Southern Nantahala Wilderness Extension - West

January 2023 Note: This area was renamed in the final Plan and EIS Alternative E Modified. It was formerly known as Southern Nantahala Wilderness Extension – Chunky Gal.

Tusquitee Ranger District / Nantahala Mountains Geographic Area

Acres Evaluated: 7,785

This inventory area was evaluated as a potential extension to Southern Nantahala Wilderness, and encompasses the Sharp Top Ridge and Chunky Gal IRAs. Portions of the area outside the IRAs, near Sugar Cove to the southwest and Yellow Mountain to the east, include low maintenance level NFS roads, recent timber harvests, and maintained wildlife fields that detract from the natural and undeveloped characteristics in their immediate vicinity. The area's northern boundary shape and configuration could act to confine recreation users to a relatively narrow peninsula surrounded on three sides by US Highway 64. Opportunities for solitude are also adversely affected in this northern area by sights and sounds of the adjacent highway and residential or agricultural development to the west.

The central portion of the evaluation area, within the Chunky Gal IRA, has the highest degree of wilderness characteristics compared to the surrounding areas. This IRA has natural and undeveloped characteristics and opportunities for solitude, and primitive and unconfined recreation. The Appalachian National Scenic Trail passes through this IRA and could adversely affect opportunities for solitude at short durations of peak use in spring and fall, but trail maintainers and partners generally support the protection offered by wilderness designation and strive to manage use in order to preserve a primitive recreation experience. Although Chunky Gal IRA is less than 5,000 acres, it could be managed to preserve and enhance wilderness characteristics as an extension to the existing wilderness. This is true to a lesser degree in the Sharp Top IRA, because of its small size, private lands on two sides, and adjacent development which negatively affect wilderness characteristics.

Alternative B

Acres Recommended: 6,231

Acres in Wilderness Study Area: None

Acres in Inventoried Roadless Area: 3,976

Miles of NFS roads (ML1 & 2): 1.1

Acres of vegetation management (< 20 years old): 40.5

Acres of maintained wildlife fields: 0.8

Miles of NFS trail managed for bicycle use: None

Acres of non-federal inholdings: 26.8

Acres of outstanding or reserved mineral rights: 265

A portion of the inventory area is included in Alternative B because the area contains a moderate to high degree of wilderness characteristics and had public support for recommendation from wilderness advocacy groups. The recommended area boundary in this alternative was driven by public comment, although it does contain some areas to the north and southwest where impacts to solitude, unconfined recreation, naturalness, and undeveloped characteristics exist. Recommendation of this area for wilderness would also create two inholdings of private land, which would affect manageability.

Alternative C

Acres Recommended: None

Consistent with the theme of Alternative C, this area is not recommended.

Alternative D

Acres Recommended: 3,510

Acres in Wilderness Study Area: None
Acres in Inventoried Roadless Area: 3,387
Miles of NFS roads (ML1 & 2): None
Acres of vegetation management (< 20 years old): None
Acres of maintained wildlife fields: 0.8
Miles of NFS trail managed for bicycle use: None
Acres of non-federal inholdings: None
Acres of outstanding or reserved mineral rights: None

Consistent with the theme of Alternative D to recommend areas with a high degree of wilderness characteristics, only the Chunky Gal IRA and some adjacent lands are recommended for wilderness designation in this alternative. As described above, this portion of the evaluation area has a high degree of natural and undeveloped characteristics, and as an extension to Southern Nantahala Wilderness the opportunities for solitude or primitive and unconfined recreation would be enhanced. Seasonal impacts to solitude may occur as Appalachian National Scenic Trail through-hikers pass in the spring and fall, but hikers would be subject to wilderness group size limits if the area is designated; as is currently the case where the trail crosses into the Southern Nantahala Wilderness.

Alternative E

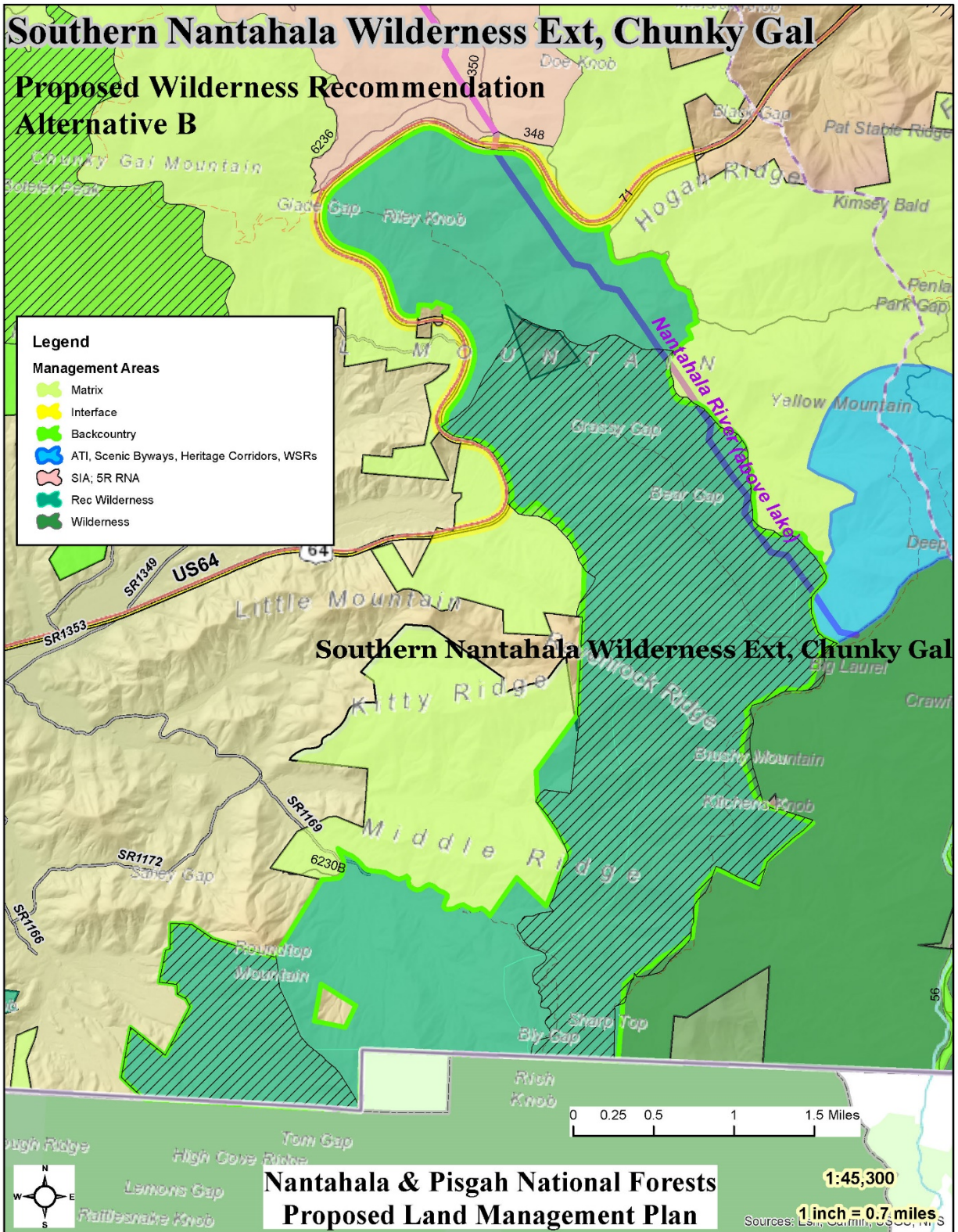
Acres Recommended: 2,055

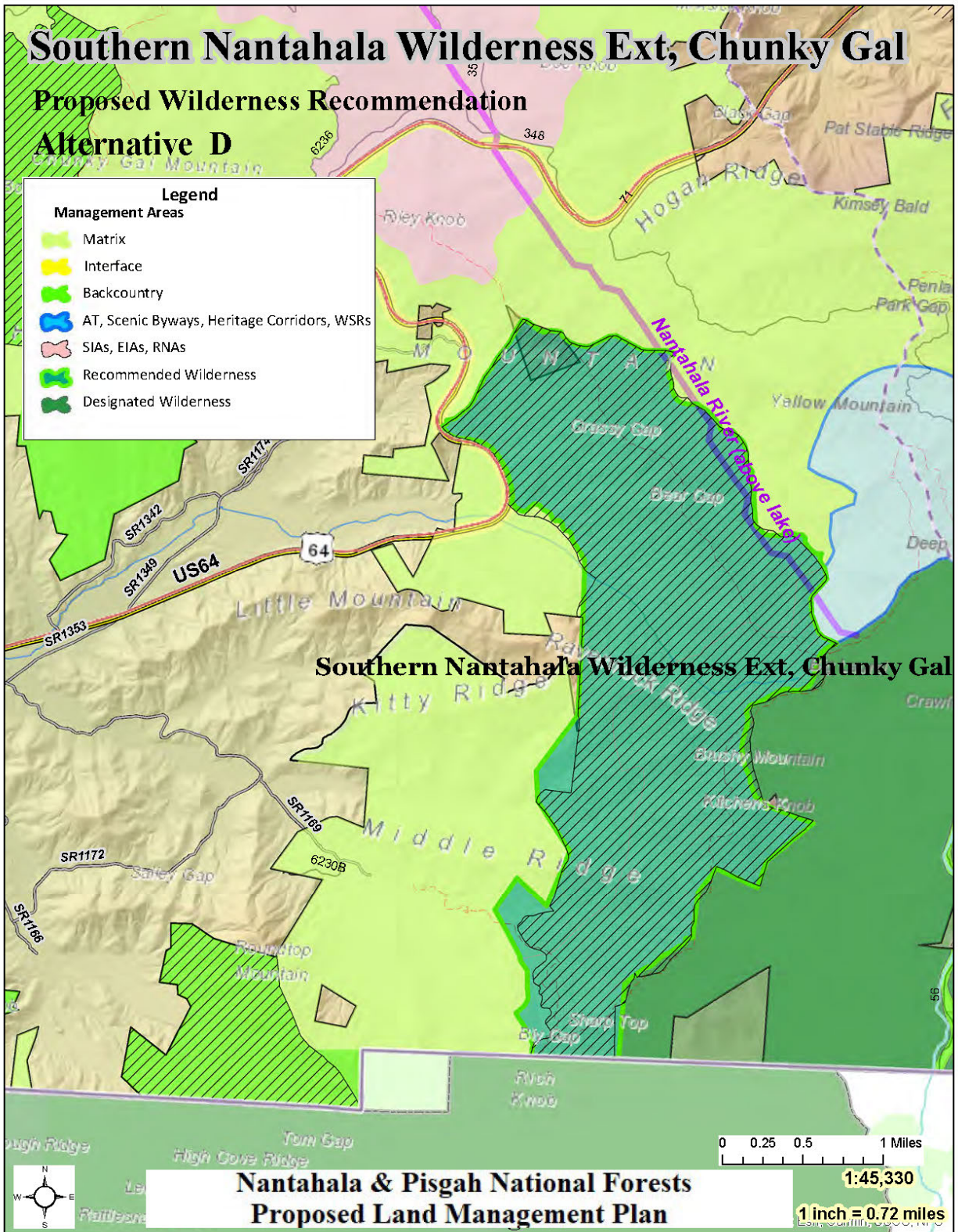
Acres in Wilderness Study Area: None
Acres in Inventoried Roadless Area: 1,782
Miles of NFS roads (ML1 & 2): None
Acres of vegetation management (< 20 years old): None
Acres of maintained wildlife fields: None
Miles of NFS trail managed for bicycle use: None
Acres of non-federal inholdings: None
Acres of outstanding or reserved mineral rights: None

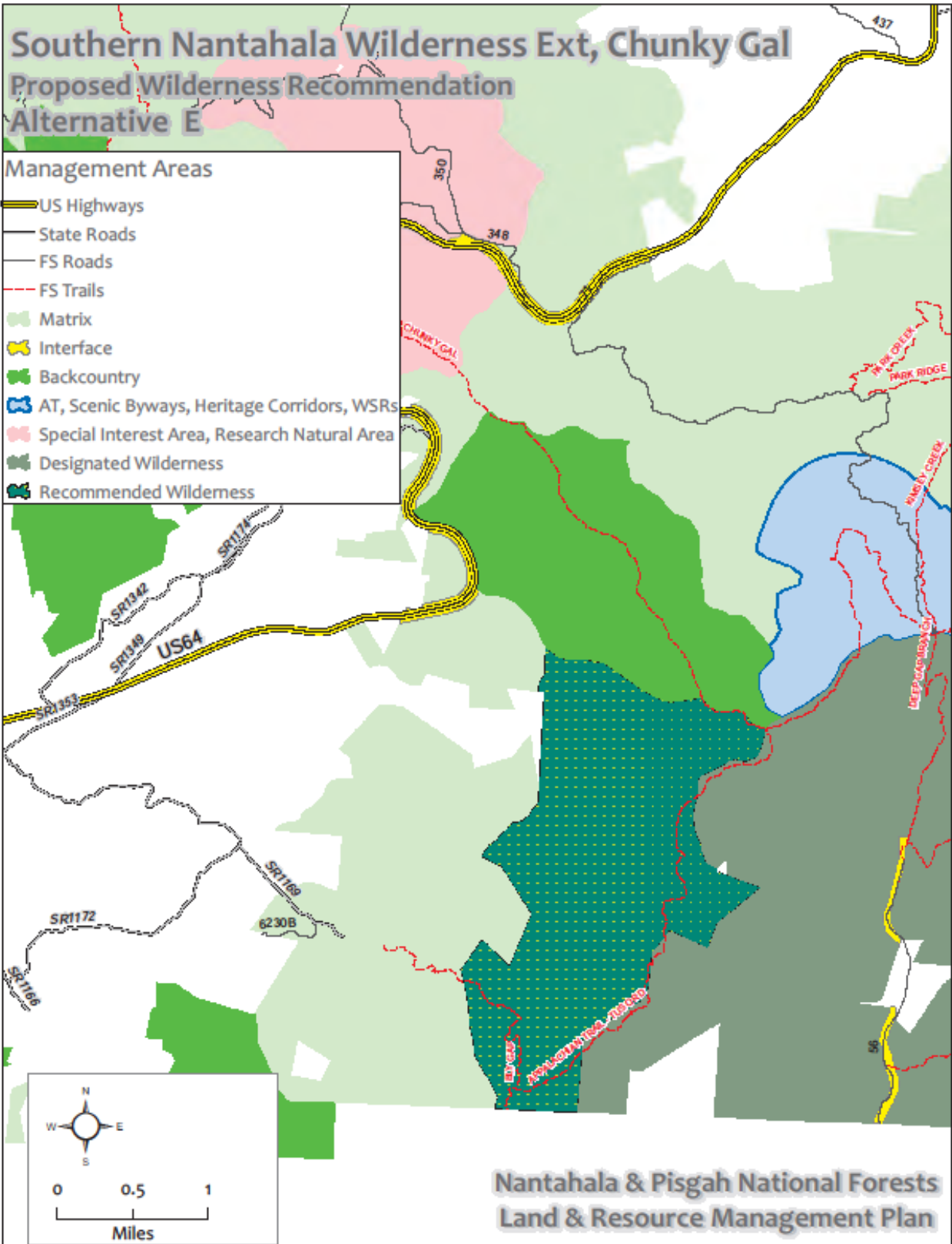
The area recommended for wilderness in Alternative E is primarily within the IRA, adjacent to Southern Nantahala Wilderness, and exhibits the highest degree of wilderness characteristics. The northern portion of the area analyzed in Alternative D is excluded from the recommendation in Alternative E because of sights and sounds from adjacent US Highway 64 and NFS Road 71D. The recommended area's northern boundary in Alternative E conforms to topographic features, and similar adjustments were made along the western boundary to include acres outside of the IRA. These adjustments provide a more consolidated configuration and will improve manageability of the area to preserve wilderness characteristics.

Alternative E Modified

Same as Alternative E. This area was renamed to Southern Nantahala Wilderness Extension - West.







Tusquitee Bald

Tusquitee Ranger District / Nantahala Mountains Geographic Area

Acres Evaluated: 29,156

At over 29,000 acres, the Tusquitee Bald evaluation area is the largest in the Nantahala and Pisgah NF's inventory of areas that may be suitable for inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System. The evaluation area is located between Andrews and Hayesville, NC, and surrounds the very popular Fires Creek recreation area. The evaluation area is almost bisected by the creek and adjacent Fires Creek Road NFSR340. This open NFS road provides access to a highly developed picnic area, a horse camp, fishing access, and multiple trailheads. Almost half of the evaluation area consists of the Tusquitee Bald Inventoried Roadless Area, which is approximately 13,646 acres in size. Characteristics of such a large evaluation area differ greatly for specific locations based on past and current management, boundary configurations, presence of constructed features, adjacent land uses, etc. The following describes wilderness characteristics in portions of the area to the north, east, and south of Fires Creek.

North of Fires Creek there are several ML1 and 2 NFS roads, recent vegetation treatments, wildlife fields, concrete remnants of a fire tower foundation, and a 50 acre inholding currently held by a land trust. Federal acquisition of this tract is anticipated within this planning cycle. Most of the roads and past vegetation management are in the western half of this northern portion. Northern slopes of the Valley River Mountains look down on the town of Andrews and the surrounding community, including a four-lane U.S. highway, extensive agricultural pasture land, commercial and residential buildings, and a small airport. Almost half of this northern portion, on both sides of the Valley River Mountains, are within Tusquitee Bald IRA.

To the east is the core of Tusquitee Bald IRA, from Weatherman Bald to Matlock Bald, which possesses the highest quality wilderness characteristics of the entire evaluation area. Conversely, to the northeast in the Kimsey Cove, Big Choga Creek, and Chestnut Orchard Branch drainages, is the area's greatest concentration of NFS roads, maintained wildlife openings, and recent vegetation management. There is also a small private inholding near Kimsey Cove.

On the south side of the Fires Creek there are fewer NFS roads, wildlife openings, and past vegetation treatments. The eastern part of this portion also lies in Tusquitee Bald IRA. However, much of this portion of the evaluation area lies south of the Tusquitee Mountains, overlooking the Tusquitee Creek community and the town of Hayesville beyond; this is especially true as the evaluation area narrows to the southwest. Also along the evaluation area southern boundary are several irregular protrusions of ownership with narrow fingers of private land between peninsulas of federal land, and four private inholdings.

Tusquitee Bald IRA provides a setting which is undeveloped, natural appearing, and has opportunities for solitude, and for primitive and unconfined recreation. These conditions also exist in other remote parts of the evaluation area, but they are more prevalent in the IRA. Areas adjacent to open roads, FS developed recreation facilities, or those with views dominated by highly developed communities may have opportunities for solitude compromised by the sights and sounds of civilization. Where ML1 or 2 NFS roads, constructed features, wildlife fields, or concentrations of recent vegetation management occur within the evaluation area, the undeveloped and natural characteristics are negatively affected. Roads, linear wildlife openings, and narrow fingers of ownership may also divide the area into smaller blocks of land that limit opportunities for primitive and unconfined recreation. Irregular boundary configurations and inholdings could make management to preserve wilderness characteristics difficult.

All of these factors are considered in determining recommended wilderness boundaries for each alternative, and the degree to which each recommended area possesses wilderness characteristics.

Alternative B

Acres Recommended: 19,230

Acres in Wilderness Study Area: None

Acres in Inventoried Roadless Area: 12,702

Miles of NFS roads (ML1 & 2): 2.4

Acres of vegetation management (< 20 years old): 40.8

Acres of maintained wildlife fields: 11

Miles of NFS trail managed for bicycle use: None

Acres of non-federal inholdings: 3.9

Acres of outstanding or reserved mineral rights: 541

The recommended area in this alternative is supported by wilderness advocacy groups and individuals, and area boundaries are driven by public comment. However, recent vegetation management in the Kimsey Cove area diminishes naturalness in the immediate vicinity, and the nearby inholding and any potential easement could complicate management to preserve wilderness characteristics of the surrounding area. Also, the southwestern part of this recommended area narrows to less than a mile wide and is primarily on the south slopes of the Tusquitee Mountains overlooking the Tusquitee Creek Community and the town of Hayesville beyond. Along this southern boundary is also a peninsula of private lands that narrows the recommended area even further, to approximately 1/2 mile wide. The distance from the ridge (or "Rim") to this private land is only 1/3 of a mile. The sights and sounds of civilization in this southwestern portion of the recommended area would diminish opportunities for solitude, its narrow width would confine opportunities for primitive recreation, and the irregular boundary with private lands could affect manageability to preserve wilderness characteristics where they do exist.

Another potential impact to solitude exists along the northern slopes of the Valley River Mountains, where the town of Andrews lies two miles in the distance. Many of these potential impacts are not pervasive across the entire recommended area, but would affect wilderness characteristics in certain locations. Overall, this recommended area has a moderate to high degree of wilderness characteristics.

Alternative C

Acres Recommended: None

Consistent with the theme of Alternative C, this area is not recommended.

Alternative D

Acres Recommended: 15,948

Acres in Wilderness Study Area: None

Acres in Inventoried Roadless Area: 12,756

Miles of NFS roads (ML1 & 2): 1.2

Acres of vegetation management (< 20 years old): 2

Acres of maintained wildlife fields: 9.6

Miles of NFS trail managed for bicycle use: None

Acres of non-federal inholdings: None

Acres of outstanding or reserved mineral rights: 545

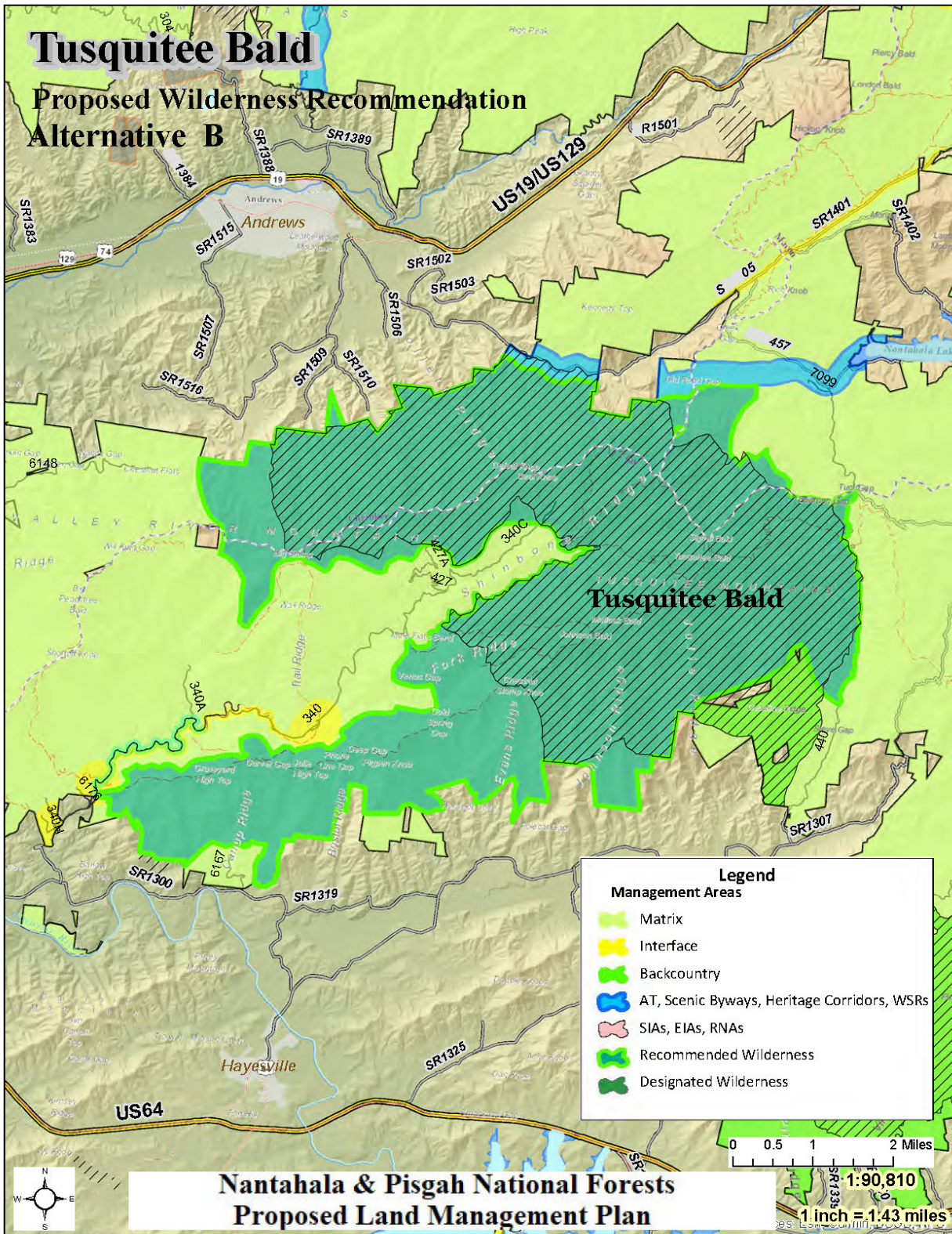
Consistent with the theme of alternative D to recommend areas with highest quality wilderness characteristics, area boundaries from public input in alternative B were modified to remove lands with a

low to moderate degree of wilderness characteristics. In other location, boundaries were expanded to include additional lands which possess a high degree of characteristics. The primary difference with the recommended area of alternative D is the exclusion of lands to the southwest where adjacent land uses or boundary configuration may affect opportunities for solitude or primitive and unconfined recreation; and lands to the northeast where concentrations of NFS roads, recent vegetation management, and a private inholding detract from natural and undeveloped characteristics. These exclusions may also improve manageability of the remaining area for the preservation of wilderness characteristics in an unimpaired condition. However, the potential for impacts to solitude from sights and sounds of civilization in Andrews, Hayesville, and Tusquitee Creek community exists in recommended areas of both alternative B and D. The result is a recommended area in alternative D with a moderate to high degree of wilderness characteristics overall; however, this alternative has a greater percentage of lands with high quality characteristics compared to alternative B.

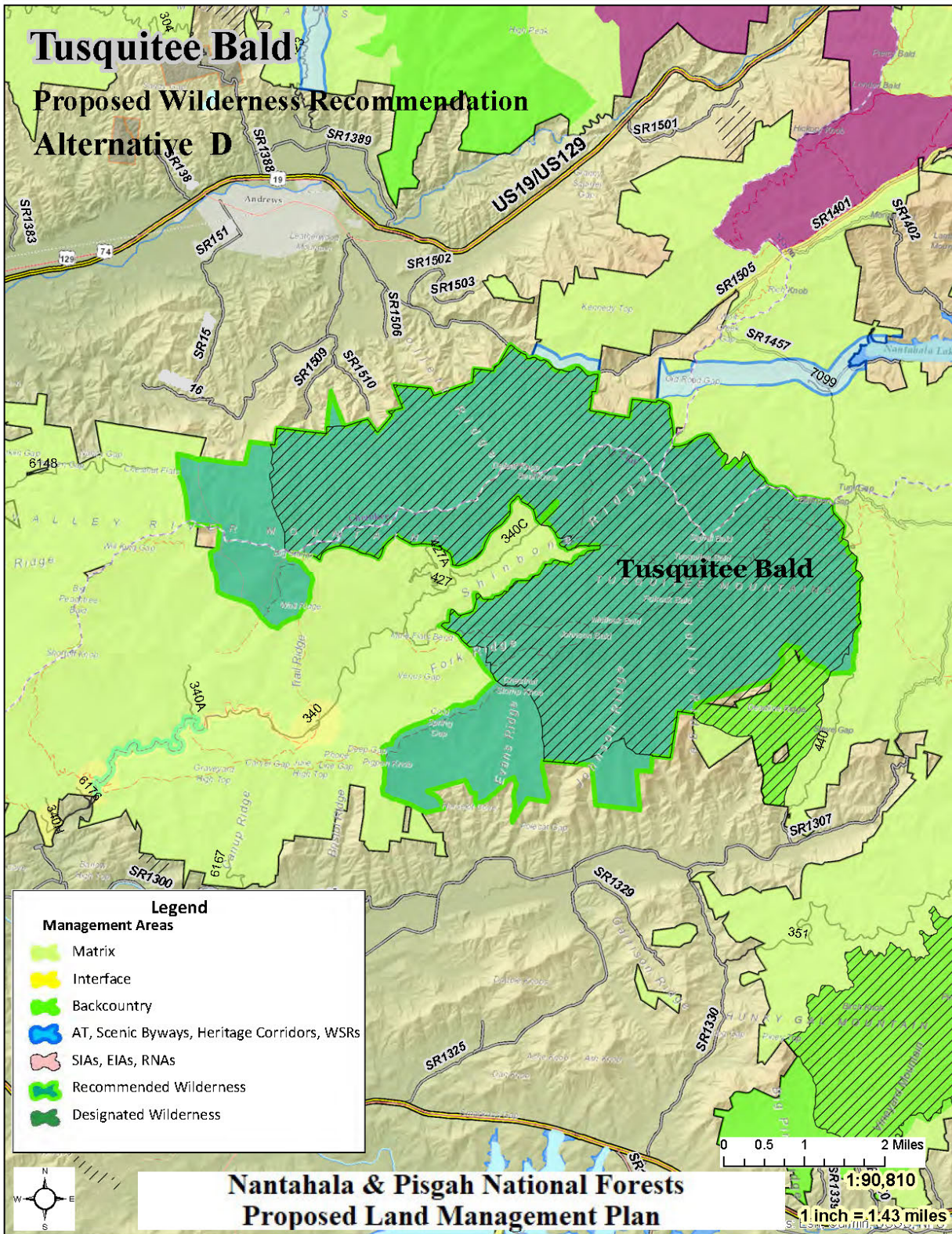
Alternative E (Preferred Alternative)

Acres Recommended: None

After consideration of the analysis and public comments, this area is not recommended in Alternative E. Although portions of the Tusquitee Bald area do have high quality wilderness characteristics, there are detractors that adversely affect those characteristics or the ability to manage for their preservation. These include visibility of the adjacent town of Andrews to the north and sights and sounds of numerous residential and commercial developments, a local airfield, US129, and many other roads. Similarly, the community of Tusquitee Creek is visible to the south with residential and agricultural development, and the town of Hayesville lies just beyond. The analysis areas in Alternatives B and D also have a “horseshoe” shape along the ridge with a concentration of open and gated NFS roads and developed recreation sites at its center along Fires Creek. There are also narrow fingers of NFS land and private inholdings to the south and southeast. When considering all of these factors together, the area configuration and extensive adjacent development would make it difficult to manage for the preservation of wilderness characteristics. This unique combination of factors contributed to the Forest Supervisor decision not to recommend the area for wilderness.



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Unicoi Mountains / Upper Bald River

Tusquitee Ranger District / Hiwassee & Unicoi Mountains Geographic Areas

Acres Evaluated: 8,952

The Unicoi Mountains/Upper Bald River evaluation area is located on the NC-TN state line northwest of Murphy NC. It is adjacent to the Cherokee NF's Upper Bald River Wilderness (designated in Dec. 2018). Although the evaluation area has had extensive vegetation management 20 to 40 years ago, treatments have revegetated and the area generally has a natural appearing condition. This is true to a greater extent at higher elevations along the state line where there is designated old growth and less evidence of past management. There are a few miles of maintenance level 1 and 2 NFS roads within the area, and many old skid roads that negatively affect the undeveloped character; these roads are more prevalent at lower elevations.

The only trail in the area is the Benton MacKaye Trail, which is managed for hiking and generally follows the state line. Opportunities for solitude and primitive and unconfined recreation exist, but primarily in the area adjacent to Upper Bald River Wilderness on the Cherokee NF. The boundary configuration along the west, south, and east are highly irregular with large peninsulas of federal land fragmented by fingers of private land; some of which have agricultural and residential development. Recommendation of this area as wilderness in conjunction with Upper Bald River Wilderness on the Cherokee NF would create two large inholdings to the west and east. Irregular boundaries and inholdings would make management to preserve wilderness characteristics difficult in all but the centrally located high-elevation lands along the state line. Overall, these factors give the area a moderate degree of wilderness characteristics.

Alternative B

Acres Recommended: 8,413

Acres in Wilderness Study Area: None

Acres in Inventoried Roadless Area: None

Miles of NFS roads (ML1 & 2): 2.6

Acres of vegetation management (< 20 years old): 16.9

Acres of maintained wildlife fields: 0.4

Miles of NFS trail managed for bicycle use: None

Acres of non-federal inholdings: None

Acres of outstanding or reserved mineral rights: None

Recommendation of Unicoi Mountains/Upper Bald River evaluation area is supported by wilderness advocacy groups and individuals, and area boundaries are driven by public comment. As described above, this area has a moderate degree of wilderness characteristics due to boundary configuration and inholdings making it difficult to manage for preservation of solitude and primitive and unconfined recreation along the western, southern, and eastern borders.

Alternative C

Acres Recommended: None

Consistent with the theme of Alternative C, this area is not recommended.

Alternative D

Acres Recommended: None

Consistent with the theme of Alternative D to only recommend areas with a high degree of wilderness characteristics, Unicoi Mountains/Upper Bald River evaluation area is not recommended in this

alternative. As described above, this is primarily due to the irregular boundaries and inholdings potentially affecting manageability to preserve wilderness characteristics in an unimpaired condition.

Alternative E

Acres Recommended: 2,655

Acres in Wilderness Study Area: None

Acres in Inventoried Roadless Area: None

Miles of NFS roads (ML1 & 2): None

Acres of vegetation management (< 20 years old): None

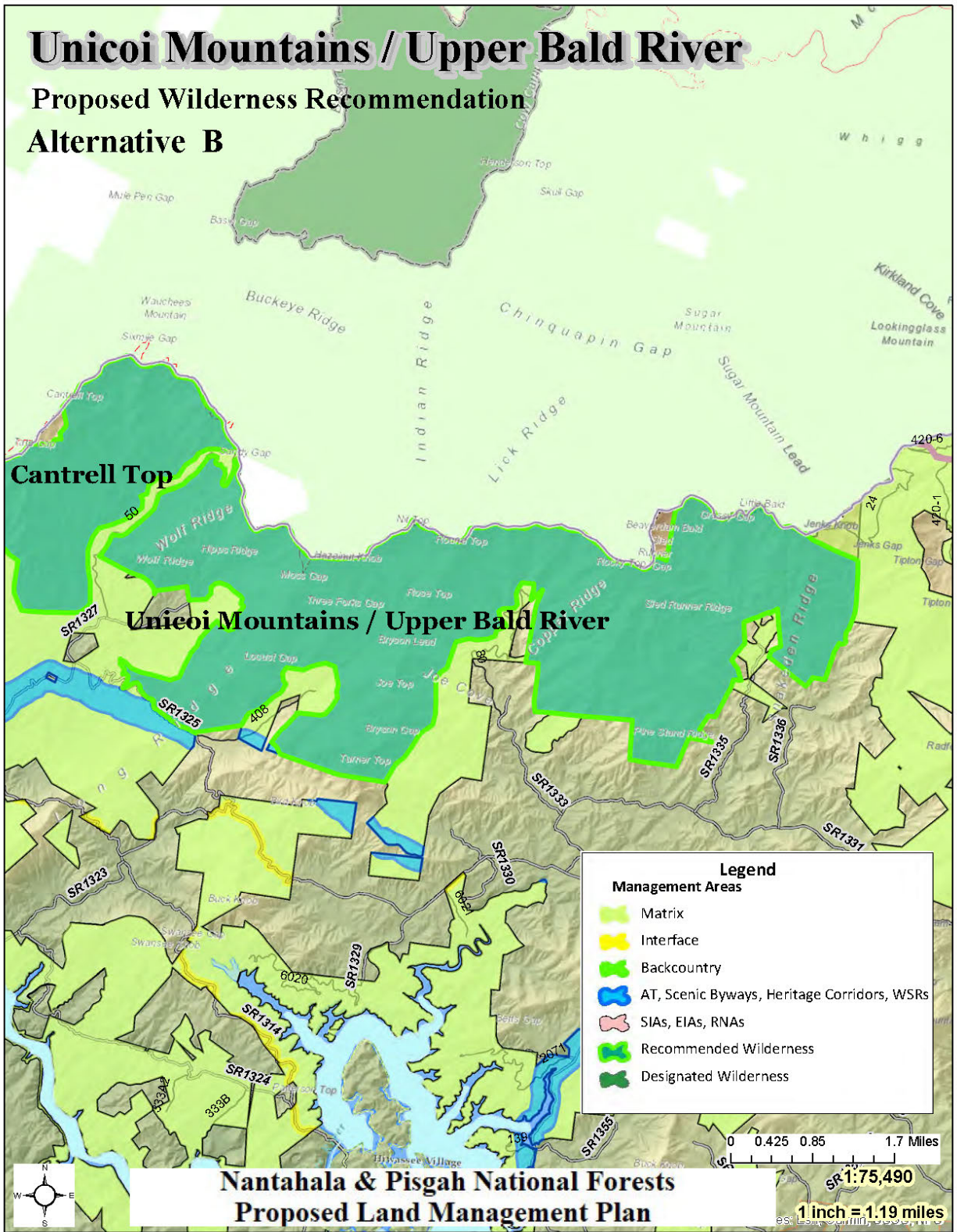
Acres of maintained wildlife fields: None

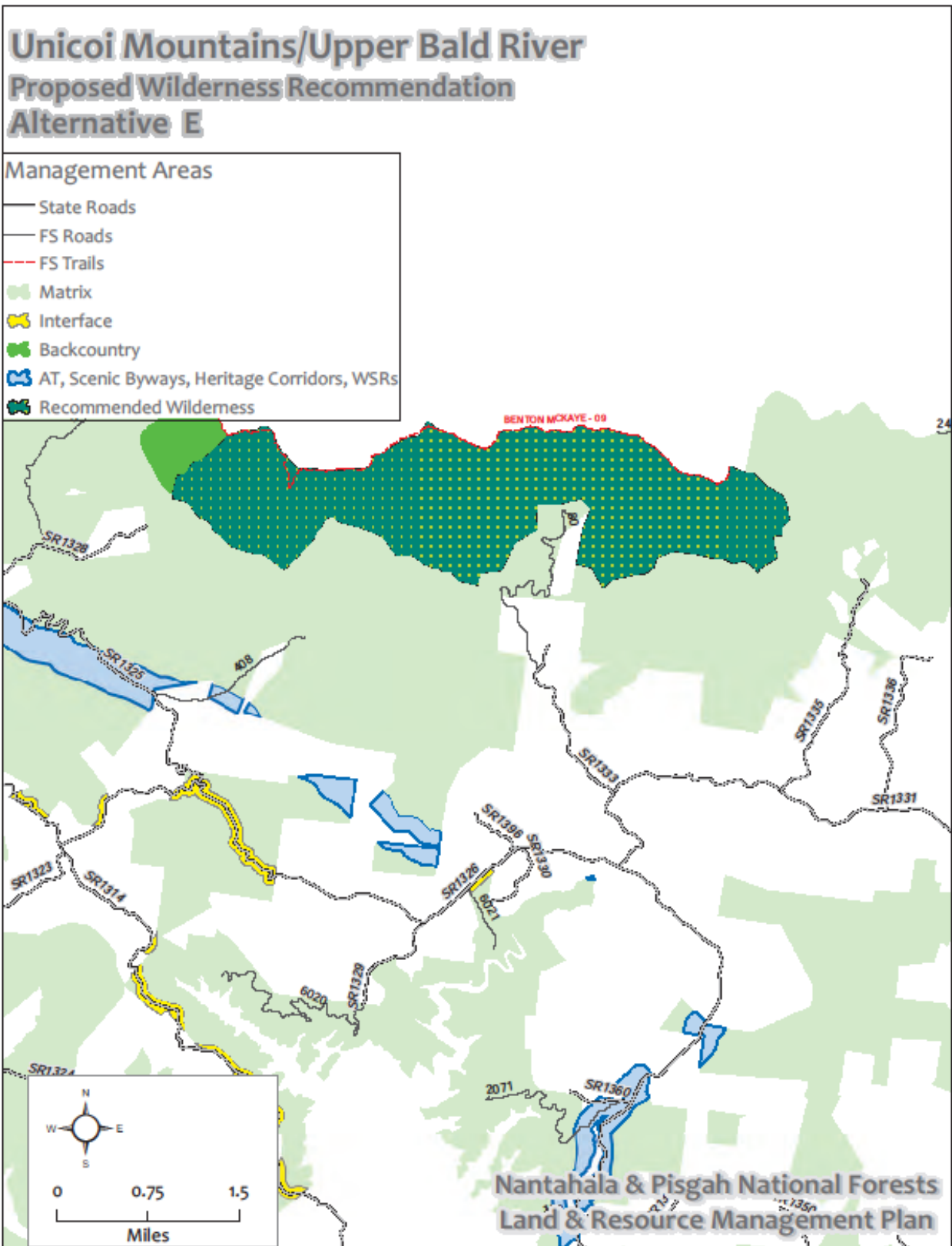
Miles of NFS trail managed for bicycle use: None

Acres of non-federal inholdings: None

Acres of outstanding or reserved mineral rights: None

Alternative E recommends the upper elevations of the evaluation area for wilderness designation, which exhibits a higher degree of wilderness characteristics than lower elevations of the area analyzed in Alternative B. The recommended area is adjacent to and would be an extension to Upper Bald River Wilderness on the Cherokee NF. Boundary adjustments were made for Alternative E which generally conform to the old growth inventory and excludes NFS roads, wildlife openings, and areas suitable for short leaf pine restoration to the south.





Wesser Bald

Nantahala Ranger District / Nantahala Gorge & Nantahala Mountains Geographic Areas

Acres Evaluated: 6,642

Wesser Bald evaluation area lies between SR1365 near Wesser Bald and US19 in the community of Wesser. The Appalachian National Scenic Trail passes through the area, as does the Wesser Creek Trail; both of which are managed as hike-only. A large portion of the evaluation area lies within the Wesser Bald Inventoried Roadless Area, which has been managed to maintain undeveloped and natural characteristics for many years. The evaluation area boundary is highly irregular with large fingers of private ownership between lobes of federal land, and there is also a small private inholding; all of which could affect manageability to preserve wilderness characteristics. Sights and sounds from adjacent lands could have negative impacts to solitude along several boundaries, but are not pervasive throughout the area. High use along the Appalachian National Scenic Trail could also affect solitude at peak trail use in spring and fall, but only in the immediate vicinity of the trail. There are opportunities for primitive recreation since the area has no trails managed for motorized or mechanized uses, but the irregular boundary configuration would confine recreation where narrow fingers of ownership exist. Overall the Wesser Bald evaluation area has a moderate to high degree of wilderness characteristics.

Alternative B

Acres Recommended: 4,093

Acres in Wilderness Study Area: None

Acres in Inventoried Roadless Area: 4,060

Miles of NFS roads (ML1 & 2): None

Acres of vegetation management (< 20 years old): None

Acres of maintained wildlife fields: None

Miles of NFS trail managed for bicycle use: None

Acres of non-federal inholdings: 6.2

Acres of outstanding or reserved mineral rights: 37.4

A portion of the evaluation area is recommended in this alternative, which generally follows the IRA boundary. This recommended area boundary is driven by public comment, and is supported by some wilderness advocacy groups and individuals. Opportunities for solitude and primitive and unconfined recreation exist, especially in the core area; however, several protrusions of ownership extend to the west, north, and east which could confine recreation users and increase exposure to sights and sounds of civilization on adjacent private lands. The irregular boundary and private inholding could also negatively affect manageability to preserve wilderness characteristics in an unimpaired condition. Overall, this recommended area has a moderate to high degree of wilderness characteristics.

Alternative C

Acres Recommended: None

Consistent with the theme of Alternative C, this area is not recommended.

Alternative D

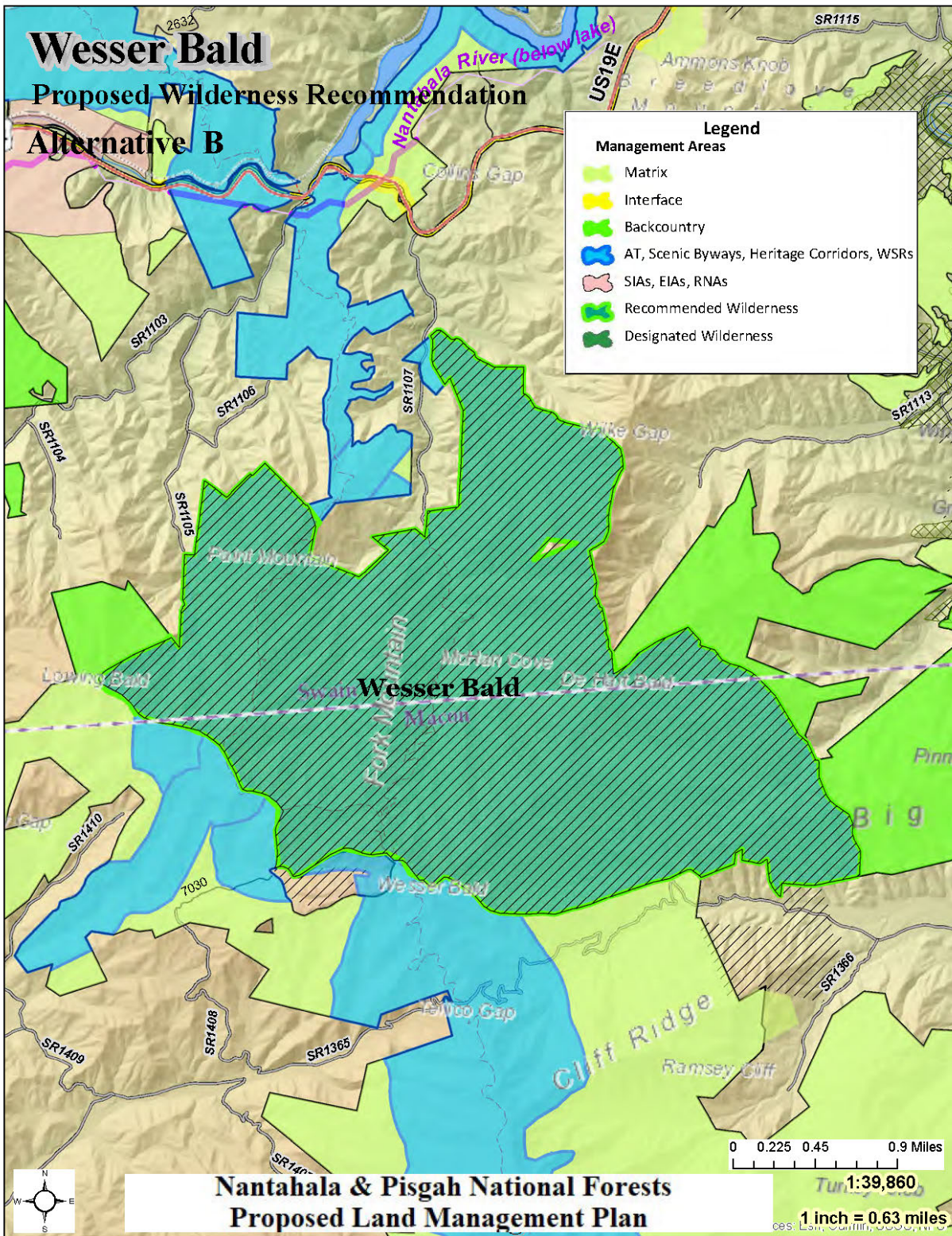
Acres Recommended: None

Consistent with the theme of Alternative D, only areas with a high degree of wilderness characteristics would be recommended for wilderness designation. Since Wesser Bald evaluation area has some detracting features and potential issues with manageability to preserve wilderness characteristics, as described above, the area is not recommended in this alternative.

Alternative E (Preferred Alternative)

Acres Recommended: None

Wesser Bald evaluation area has some detracting features and potential issues with manageability to preserve wilderness characteristics, as described above. After consideration of the analysis and public comments, this area is not recommended in Alternative E.



Step 4. Recommendation

The draft record of decision identifies the fourteen areas listed below as the preliminary administrative recommendation (recommended wilderness) in alternative E. The decision maker carefully considered a range of recommended wilderness areas, as well as other allocations, to determine the mix of land and resource uses that would best meet public needs. The areas recommended in this decision are an appropriate distribution for the Forest in consideration of the wilderness evaluation for each area, alternative analyses, and public comments.

January 2023 Note: The Southern Nantahala extensions area were renamed in the final Plan and EIS Alternative E Modified.

- Bald Mountains – 6,319 acres
- Craggy Mountain – 3,222 acres
- Harper Creek – 7,044 acres
- Joyce Kilmer-Slickrock Wilderness Extension (#2), Deep Creek-Avey Creek – 1,912 acres
- Joyce Kilmer-Slickrock Wilderness Extension (#4), Sugar Cove Branch – 326 acres
- Lost Cove – 5,681 acres
- Mackey Mountain – 7,872 acres
- Shining Rock Wilderness Extension, Dark Prong – 939 acres
- Shining Rock Wilderness Extension, Sam Branch – 688 acres
- Snowbird – 8,335 acres
- Southern Nantahala Wilderness Extension East - 998 acres
- Southern Nantahala Wilderness Extension West – 2,055 acres
- Southern Nantahala Wilderness Extension, Central – 1,052 acres
- Unicoi Mountains/Upper Bald River – 2,655 acres

Total recommendation for designation in the National Wilderness Preservation System – 49,098 acres

Rationale for Areas Not Analyzed as Recommended Wilderness in the Environmental Impact Statement

The following areas were included in the first step of identifying lands that may be suitable for inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System, but are not being carried forward into the Environmental Impact Statement, as they are not consistent with the alternatives being considered in detail. Wilderness characteristics were considered cumulatively across the entire area to determine whether an area would be analyzed in an alternative. Additionally, public comments that were received during the inventory and evaluation steps helped inform the range of alternatives. For reasons described below, the following areas do not have wilderness characteristics and are excluded from further analysis. A complete evaluation of each area can be found in Step 2: Evaluation, page 8 of this appendix.

Areas Not Included in Any Alternative (acres)	Evaluation Report Page #	Rationale for not including area in any alternative
Ash Cove (5,885)	225	The Ash Cove area has impacts to naturalness from a communication site within the area and managed linear wildlife openings. There are impacts to solitude from sights and sounds of development visible in the valley, including the town of Andrews, and an active railroad and airfield. The southern boundary is irregular, reducing manageability as well as confining recreational opportunities. There are no outstanding qualities in this area that are unique on the National Forest.
Bearwallow (4,130)	Page 17	Apparent naturalness of the Bearwallow area is impacted by evidence of past and current human infrastructure, including old logging roads, maintained wildlife openings and seven roaded stream crossings. The area has opportunities for primitive and unconfined recreation, although some area trails are very popular and have the potential to diminish opportunities for solitude. The heavy visitor use on the trail system and the nearby parking areas and developed recreation affect solitude. The area contains a high quality high elevation forest, similar to nearby areas. The area's size and boundaries reduce the ability to manage the area for preservation in an unimpaired condition.

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Areas Not Included in Any Alternative (acres)	Evaluation Report Page #	Rationale for not including area in any alternative
Boteler Peak (10,524)	229	<p>The Boteler Peak area has natural appearing forests, and opportunities for solitude and primitive and unconfined recreation in portions of the area. However, naturalness is adversely affected in areas with recent timber management, closed roads, and wildlife habitat improvements. Solitude is affected by sights and sounds of civilization where evident from ridgetops and many southern and western facing slopes. Also, the irregular boundary configuration limits opportunities for unconfined recreation in those narrow arms of NFS lands. While the core Inventoried Roadless Area contains stronger wilderness characteristics than the Boteler Peak area as a whole, the IRA area alone is not of a sufficient size and configuration to make its preservation and use in an unimpaired condition practicable.</p>
Cedar Rock Mountain (8,682)	190	<p>Opportunities for solitude in the Cedar Rock area would be limited due to the high amount of diverse recreation use and abundance of trails throughout the area. Naturalness of the area is compromised by recent vegetation management, mowed linear wildlife fields, a powerline corridor, and well-developed trails and constructed features.</p>

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Areas Not Included in Any Alternative (acres)	Evaluation Report Page #	Rationale for not including area in any alternative
Cheoah Bald (9,400)	Page 56	Portions of the area have natural appearing forests, particularly on the ridges and northeastern slopes, but apparent naturalness of the area is impacted by low maintenance level NFS roads and maintained wildlife fields to the south and southeast of Cheoah Bald itself. Area boundaries form several narrow arms to the west, south, and north; some of which are less than 0.2 miles wide, two or more miles long, and predominately surrounded by private lands. This boundary configuration restricts users to narrow strips of National Forest lands, and negatively affects opportunities for primitive and unconfined recreation. Solitude is also impacted by sights and sounds of NC143 to the west, US19 and an active railroad in the Nantahala River Gorge to the east, and blasting from a nearby quarry. Opportunities for solitude are also affected by the high probability of visitor encounters along the Appalachian Trail and Bartram Trail. These are very popular segments of both trails due to their connections to Nantahala River Gorge and multiple access points at Stecoah Gap, Beechertown, and Wesser. The area receives additional use from hikers on Bear Creek Trail and Nolton Ridge Road, which also provide access to Cheoah Bald.
Daniel Ridge (11,694)	195	Heavy recreation use, abundant infrastructure, and recent vegetation management all negatively impact naturalness and opportunities for solitude in the area. The area is of sufficient size but has boundaries that would be difficult to manage to preserve wilderness characteristics. The Daniel Ridge area has outstanding scenic attributes and water resources, but these are not unique in the Southern Appalachian Mountains.
Deerpark Mountain / Bluff Mountain (3,314)	Page 34	The area is not of sufficient size and configuration to manage its preservation and use in an unimpaired condition. Wildlife openings and heavily used hiking trails detract from the naturalness and the solitude of the area. Adjacent private ownership and infrastructure and a frequently traveled highway contribute to sights and sounds of civilization and detract from naturalness and opportunities for solitude.

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Areas Not Included in Any Alternative (acres)	Evaluation Report Page #	Rationale for not including area in any alternative
Dobson Knob (11,763)	Page 91	Although the area contains a 5,955 acre Inventoried Roadless Area, management for wilderness characteristics would be difficult due to the narrow configuration and extensive border it shares with private property. Sights and sounds of civilization, including US221, a railroad, and NC1238 have the potential to affect the naturalness and solitude of the area. NC1238, which separates the area from the Linville Gorge Wilderness, is the primary point of access for visitors on the western rim of the gorge. Dobson Knob Road splits from NC1238 and leads to a private tract where a communications tower exists, and there is a power line corridor that bisects the area.
Fishhawk Mountain (5,670)	Page 152	Apparent naturalness of the area is impacted by existing roads, residential property around the perimeter and within the interior (inholdings), and maintained wildlife fields. The area contains evidence of past and current human modification with 3.3 miles of roads and 465 acres of private, non-federal inholdings and their associated access rights-of-ways. Opportunities for solitude or primitive and unconfined recreation are impacted by the fragmented ownership as well as sights and sounds from development surrounding the area.
Harper Creek Extension, Sugar Knob (6,175)		The Harper Creek Extension area has apparent naturalness and opportunities for solitude in its core area along the steep slopes of Upper Creek drainage; however, adverse impacts to wilderness characteristics are common beyond this core area. Extensive past and current timber and wildlife management affect the area's natural appearance in many locations to the north, west, and southeast, as does the highly developed trail at Upper Creek Falls. Sights and sounds of the adjacent highway and likely encounters with waterfall visitors, and large outfitter and guide groups detract from solitude.

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Areas Not Included in Any Alternative (acres)	Evaluation Report Page #	Rationale for not including area in any alternative
Highlands of Roan (5,217)	Page 38	There are unique bald ecosystems and associated wildlife and plants in the area that depend on routine maintenance for their persistence, which detracts from naturalness. Management to maintain bald habitats is done with motorized equipment, while developments present in the area and the irregular configuration negatively impact the potential to manage the area as wilderness. The heavy public use of the area has a significant impact on solitude.
Jarrett Creek (8,972)	106	The Jarrett Creek area has some combination of wilderness characteristics across much of the area, but existing uses and other impacts to wilderness characteristics occur at multiple locations in and around the area. The area offers opportunities for solitude in some locations, but sights and sounds of the adjacent Blue Ridge Parkway, NFSR482, and the town of Old Fort detract from solitude in other locations. Solitude is also impacted by high use on mountain bike trails and by encounters with large groups operating under special use permits. The area offers opportunities for primitive and unconfined recreation over much of the area, but designated mountain bike trails bisect the area and segments of open NFS roads are also present; both of which negatively affect manageability as wilderness and opportunities for unconfined recreation.
Joyce Kilmer Slickrock Ext #1 (3,554)	Page 61	Ongoing projects, the distribution of wildlife fields and old roads across the area adversely affect naturalness in all but the highest ridges and steepest slopes. Although Joyce Kilmer-Slickrock Wilderness Extension #1 area is adjacent to wilderness and has many scenic locations, the combination and distribution of uses and improvements limits opportunities for solitude. Additionally, the shape and configuration of the area does not lend itself well to wilderness management.

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Areas Not Included in Any Alternative (acres)	Evaluation Report Page #	Rationale for not including area in any alternative
Laurel Mountain (10,946)	200	The Laurel Creek area contains evidence of past and current human modification, has high visitor use, and a water supply reservoir that detract from naturalness. High recreation use and sights or sounds from the Blue Ridge Parkway detracts from opportunities for solitude through much of the area.
Linville Pinnacle Extension (620)	116	This extension to the Linville Gorge Wilderness has visible impacts from recent vegetation management, maintenance of wildlife fields and closed roads, all of which detract from the naturalness of the area throughout the area. This relatively small area is bordered by two roads on the eastern and western sides which impact the area's solitude with sounds of vehicular traffic.
Nolichucky Gorge (2,465)	Page 43	The Nolichucky Gorge area is less than half of the size typically considered sufficient to manage for preservation and use in an unimpaired condition. Current uses, maintained wildlife openings, and infrastructure impact the natural characteristics of the area, while potential sights or sounds of civilization and inholdings detract from opportunities for solitude, especially the active railroad that is adjacent to portions of the northern boundary.
Panther town Valley (4,395)	Page 162	Heavy recreational use and an extensive network of high density of trails impact naturalness and opportunities for solitude across this area. Past human modification is evident and there are maintained wildlife openings and a lookout tower. The area contains unique geology and outstanding scenic attributes, and the creeks found in the valley are home to waterfalls which attract a large number of visitors each year. The area's size and relationship to adjacent private lands reduces the ability to practically manage its preservation in an unpaired condition.

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Areas Not Included in Any Alternative (acres)	Evaluation Report Page #	Rationale for not including area in any alternative
Piercy Mountain Range (9,109)	247	The Piercy Mountain Range area has many locations where modifications to the natural-appearing landscape are evident; where solitude is adversely impacted by adjacent land uses; and where boundary configuration and shape confine recreation use to narrow fingers of NFS land. The area does not have unique or outstanding qualities within the context of the Southern Appalachians.
Pigeon River (5,990)	Page 47	Naturalness of the area is impacted by evidence from past farming and logging, signs of recent forest management, maintained wildlife fields and infrastructure including shelters, roads and stream crossings. The heavy use of the existing trails within the area, as well as sights, sounds and vehicle emissions from the adjacent I-40 corridor, as well as the east coast airport flight path diminish opportunities for solitude. Management of this area would be difficult given the size and configuration of the area.
Santeetlah Headwaters (4,484)	Page 77	The Santeetlah Headwaters area is less than 5,000 acres and has many areas that have experienced human modification and management, both past and present. The existence of old logging roads, past vegetation treatments and existing wildlife fields all detract from the naturalness of the area. Impacts to solitude from the Cherohala Skyway, air traffic above, and high visitor use would also detract from wilderness characteristics.
Siler Bald (6,280)	Page 166	Naturalness in the Siler Bald area is impacted by an abundance of Forest Service system roads as well as past and ongoing management of wildlife fields. The core of the area is topographically exposed to surrounding developments including US64, Wayah Road, and Dirty John Shooting Range, all of which impact opportunities for solitude or primitive and unconfined recreation.

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Areas Not Included in Any Alternative (acres)	Evaluation Report Page #	Rationale for not including area in any alternative
Slide Hollow (199)	Page 52	The entire Slide Hollow area is within the Slide Hollow Inventoried Roadless Area, and is contiguous with the Inventoried Roadless Area on the Cherokee NF. Given the small size of the area, potential sights or sounds of adjacent lands, including popular waterfall areas and private lands, detract from naturalness and opportunities for solitude. An old logging road crosses the area and provides evidence of past management in the area.
South Mills River (17,105)	Page 220	The South Mills River area is large enough and configured in such a way that it has some wilderness characteristics; however, the area has many negative impacts to naturalness and solitude. Evidence of past and current human modification and the well-developed trails impact apparent naturalness. The high visitor use impacts solitude. The area has outstanding scenic attributes but these are not unique in the Southern Appalachian Mountains. Infrastructure and potential sights or sounds of civilization detract from naturalness and opportunities for solitude in some areas.
Steels Creek (5,841)	Page 130	Approximately 12% of the area has been managed in the last 40 years by timber harvest or as maintained wildlife openings. These treatments are substantially noticeable in several locations and adversely affect apparent naturalness. The area boundary configuration creates narrow arms to the north, west, and south; most of which are less than a half mile in width. The open NFS Road 228 further divides the area with a heavily used two mile corridor cutting deep into the area's core. These narrow arms and open road fragment the area and affect opportunities for primitive and unconfined recreation. Solitude is also impacted by sights and sounds of NC181 to the east, dispersed camping along NFSR228, and a highly developed private campground to the south. This campground, which sits only 0.3 miles from area boundaries, hosts outdoor events and gatherings including motorcycle and ATV races. With these impacts to solitude and limitations to unconfined recreation, the Steels Creek area could not be managed for wilderness characteristics.

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Areas Not Included in Any Alternative (acres)	Evaluation Report Page #	Rationale for not including area in any alternative
Tellico Bald (12,525)	Page 175	An irregular boundary shape and numerous narrow protrusions affect manageability as wilderness. Given the configuration, sights and sounds from the area roads and from the adjacent residential and agricultural lands would affect solitude in some sections. Tellico Bald area has opportunities for solitude and primitive recreation in the area currently managed for backcountry. However, this core area is still relatively small at less than 2,500 acres and would be difficult to manage as wilderness. Additionally, many locations within the area have existing uses and infrastructure which are inconsistent with managing for wilderness characteristics.
Terrapin Mountain (5,441)	Page 180	The core of the Terrapin Mountain area is generally free from recent vegetation management and has opportunities for primitive and unconfined recreation; however, adjacent land uses and the fragmented ownership in the area affect the naturalness and solitude opportunities. Maintained wildlife fields and recent vegetation management on the western and eastern sides detract from naturalness in those areas as well.
Upper Wilson Creek (6,373)	135	Much of the Upper Wilson Creek area is natural appearing, with 75% of it in Inventoried Roadless Area, and Wild and Scenic River corridor. However, other parts of the area have concentrations of recent timber harvest, and maintained wildlife fields which detract from naturalness. Opportunities for solitude or primitive and unconfined recreation exist in places as well, such as the WSR corridor; but convoluted area boundaries, a large private inholding with easement, and an open NFS road extending over 4 miles into the area combine to adversely affect solitude and unconfined recreation. Boundary configuration, road infrastructure, and wildlife habitat improvements also affect manageability of the area.

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Areas Not Included in Any Alternative (acres)	Evaluation Report Page #	Rationale for not including area in any alternative
Woods Mountain (12,701)	Page 140	With most of the Woods Mountain area in an Inventoried Roadless Area, many locations have the wilderness characteristic of apparent naturalness. However, area boundaries are convoluted with many narrow arms, and the non-federal lands and open road along Armstrong Creek almost divide the area in half. The larger area, south of Armstrong Creek, is further divided by mountain bike trails and an open NFS road. These features tend to segment the area into smaller sections that limit opportunities for primitive and unconfined recreation. This is because users cannot move freely in any direction for more than one mile without encountering an open road, mountain bike trail, or area boundary. Solitude is also adversely affected by these features and their motorized or mechanized uses. Other impacts to solitude are sights and sounds of the Blue Ridge Parkway sitting high above the area to the northwest, and the likelihood of visitor encounters with outfitter and guide groups that frequent the area.
Yellow Creek Mountains (4,445)	Page 86	Current infrastructure, roads, recent vegetation management and invasive species detract from naturalness of the area. Opportunities for solitude are limited in the area given high recreation use, and adjacency to private developed lands. The irregular configuration of the Yellow Creek Mountains area and adjacency to developed private lands would make manageability of this area as wilderness difficult.