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Nantahala and Pisgah National Forests



Final Environmental Impact Statement

for the
Land Management Plan

Appendix H: Public and
Government Involvement

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**Final Environmental Impact Statement
Nantahala and Pisgah National Forests
Appendix H. Public and Government Involvement**

Prepared By:

**Alice Cohen, Partnership Specialist
Susan Parker, University of Georgia**

For Information Contact:

**Michelle Aldridge, Forest Planner
National Forests in North Carolina
160 Zillicoa Street Suite A
Asheville, NC 28801
(828) 257- 4200
www.fs.usda.gov/goto/nfsnc/nprevision**

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Introduction

A forest plan that is reflective of diverse interests and communities can only be successfully implemented through sustained public involvement in an environment that is welcoming and inclusive. Attention was paid to create a range of opportunities for collaboration and interaction with Forest Service staff to facilitate broad participation. The final Plan and final Environmental Impact Statement were built on an unprecedented degree of public and government involvement for the Nantahala and Pisgah National Forests. The high level of collaboration and input provides a foundation for equitable benefits from the Forests and an increased understanding of the values of the diverse communities and individuals that care about the planning area. The Plan's strong emphasis on public involvement has provided a platform for diverse interests to work together to create a more inclusive and collaborative Plan. This appendix documents that involvement.

In this planning process, Forest leadership and the plan revision team invested in outreach, dialogue and relationships with partners, community stakeholders and non-traditional audiences to engage them early and often throughout the planning process. In building the Plan, EIS alternatives and the analysis, the Forest Service engaged with local citizens, resource professionals, state agencies, local governments, other Federal agencies, federally recognized Tribes, non-government organizations, researchers, the academic community, and youth. Additionally, there have been three active collaborative groups involved with the Nantahala-Pisgah plan revision process, representing diverse interests.

Pre-draft pieces of the Plan have been shared with the public at every stage—Assessment, Need for Change, pre-draft plan development—to gather input on the range of alternatives for the EIS, and during the formal comment period on the proposed plan and the draft EIS. More information about each of these stages can be found below. In addition, the public has had an opportunity to provide input on specific plan processes, including, but not limited to the Wilderness Evaluation process, the Wild and Scenic River evaluation process, the transition to the Scenery Management System and the identification of Species of Conservation Concern. Different levels of public participation were incorporated, depending on the piece of plan development. Public involvement strategies included collaborating, involving, consulting and informing.

Both traditional and emerging technologies have been used to reach diverse audiences. The Forest Service hosted 49 face-to-face and virtual meetings at locations around the Forest. Upon request, the Forest Service participated in others' meetings, including local governments, non-governmental organizations and interest groups. Forest staff attended more than 120 meetings with collaborative groups and met with federally recognized Native American Tribes 17 times. The Forest Service offered 17 programs to youth and reached out to local, state, and Federal agencies throughout the process, including 65 meetings in addition to emails and phone communications.

The Forest Service also shared information via traditional print, television and radio media. Requests for radio and television interviews were accepted in addition to print media correspondence and outreach. The internet was utilized to broadcast updates to the forest listserv of approximately 12,000 subscribers and updates were posted to the forest website and Facebook page. Creative media tools were utilized in the making of several of the updates. The Forest Service used emerging technologies, such as interactive Storymaps, Facebook Live, YouTube postings, and social media to share pre-draft content, as well as the formal draft materials. Regularly collaborators assisted the plan revision efforts by sharing Forest Service messages with their constituents and the public. Additionally, the Forest Service shifted to virtual outreach and collaboration formats with the onset of the coronavirus pandemic, the effects of which started in 2019. To address rural communities with limited broadband capacity, scheduled open houses

were converted to an online format, complimented by open house-style conference calls available to the public and all other internal and external collaboration utilized virtual platforms.

Input from the public has been used to:

- Document the current condition and trend of forest resources
- Identify the need for change
- Draft plan direction by resource topic
- Develop a management area structure
- Create a geographic area chapter
- Create alternatives
- Inform the analysis of effects
- Inform the final plan and environmental analysis

Public and government involvement is not just part of plan development, it will be an integral part of plan implementation, monitoring and adaptive management. One of four plan themes is Partnering with Others, outlining how forest managers will work with Federal, state and local governments, Tribes, and partners across boundaries to achieve shared objectives. Working collaboratively allows the Forest Service to accomplish more work on the ground than any one entity could accomplish alone. The very first section of plan direction outlines desired conditions for working with others, stating that public involvement will lead to better outcomes for forest resources. During implementation, public and local government involvement will allow for continued learning and understanding between the Forest Service and others and will promote a common understanding of resource opportunities and challenges. The plan intends that proactive efforts reach both traditional and non-traditional users and lead to a greater citizen understanding, appreciation, advocacy, and participation in forest stewardship and conservation.

More on public involvement milestones and the individuals, organizations and local governments involved in forest plan development is outlined in the following pages. Documentation of public engagement at major milestones in plan development are followed by ongoing group involvement and then public engagement with the release of the proposed plan and draft EIS and during the formal comment period.

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Public Engagement at Major Plan Development Milestones

The process included the following steps and public outreach from initiation to release of draft plan and environmental analysis. This Major Milestones section focuses on public meetings hosted by the Forest Service. Additional involvement by collaborative groups, youth, agencies and federally recognized tribes is listed in the following section, followed by the final phase including the release of the proposed plan and draft EIS and public engagement during the formal comment period.

Federal Register and Newspaper of Record Notifications

Notice	Federal Register Publication Date
Notice of Initiation	10/3/2013
Notice of Notice of Intent to Revise the Forest Plan	3/12/2014
Final Need for Change	6/14/2014
Release of the Proposed Plan and Draft Environmental Impact Statement	2/14/2020
Extension of the Proposed Plan and Draft Environmental Impact Statement comment period due to Covid-19	5/8/2020

2013: Plan Revision Process Initiation

In February and March of 2013, the Forest Service, National Forests in North Carolina, held six public meetings to initiate the Forest Plan revision process for the Nantahala and Pisgah National Forests (NFs). During the meetings, Forest Service staff members provided an overview of the plan revision process, shared information regarding the existing condition of forest resources, and received input from the public on benefits they obtain from the Nantahala and Pisgah National Forests. Each meeting was 3 hours in the evening and was in the vicinity of the six ranger districts.

Attendees included local residents, members of organized recreation groups, tribal members, county and city planners, government officials, local business owners, outfitter guides, and environmental advocates. There were more than 570 attendees at the six meetings, and many individuals attended more than one district meeting. Members of the Forest Service plan revision interdisciplinary team (ID team) and ranger district employees were present at all of the public meetings.

The meetings were opened by a welcome from the District Ranger, Forest Supervisor Kristin Bail, Deputy Forest Supervisor Diane Rubiaco, and Public Affairs Officer Stevin Westcott. Former Forest Planner, Ruth Berner, presented information on the background of forest planning, the plan revision process, and a general timeline for how the agency would proceed over the next 3-4 years. The slideshow presentation is available on the forest website. All comments that were provided on the posters were collected at the end of each meeting and are also available for review on the forest website.

Meeting location	Date	Approximate number of public attendees
Robbinsville, NC	2/21/2013	54
Murphy, NC	3/05/2013	71
Franklin, NC	3/19/2013	60
Mars Hill, NC	2/25/2013	110
Brevard, NC	3/18/2013	190
Marion, NC	3/12/2013	91
		Total 576

The second round of public involvement sessions were held in May 2013. Participants attended one of two meetings held in Franklin and Asheville, North Carolina. Participants included those that had attended the first round of public meetings, held in February and March, as well as new participants that were joining the process for the first time.

Meeting location	Date	Approximate number of public attendees
Franklin, NC	5/23/2013	64
Asheville, NC	5/30/2013	135
		Total 199

The public sessions were 3-hour evening meetings and included presentations by Forest Service staff followed by group discussions centered around three main topics: young forests and wildlife habitat, recreational access and scenery, and designated areas. These discussion topics were selected based on public comments and input received at the first round of public meetings earlier in the spring. Information on each of these topics was presented to the entire group of attendees and is available on the forest website.

2013-2014: Need for Change

In November and December of 2013, the Nantahala and Pisgah National Forests held six public open houses to gather information on what needed to change in the revised forest plan. The open houses were informal, not facilitated, and designed for people to drop by and share ideas and feedback that would be used to craft a “Need for Change” statement.

Meeting location	Date	Approximate number of public attendees
Robbinsville, NC	12/05/13	40
Murphy, NC	12/03/2013	27
Franklin, NC	12/17/2013	34
Mars Hill, NC	12/03/2013	33
Brevard, NC	11/19/2013	64
Marion, NC	11/18/2013	26
		Total 224

Additionally, on Sept 20, 2013, a draft work-in-progress Assessment was posted on the internet. This document assessed current condition and trends on the landscape for a full range of ecological, social, and economic topics. This Assessment, along with public input, led to the development of the preliminary Need for Change as identified in the Federal Register Notice of Intent, published on March 12, 2014, with the final published on June 14, 2014.

Early in plan development, presentations were made to schools to share information with **youth** about the Forest and forest planning. Later in plan development, emphasis was shifted to share materials with educators, such as through the regional Envirothon competition, so educators could incorporate the forest planning process into their own curricula.

Date	Organization	Audience	Approx. # of Attendees
September 2013	Jewish Community Center, Asheville	Kindergarten – 4 th grade	50
October 2013	Oakley Elementary, Asheville	2 nd grade class	16
	Eliada School, Asheville	Pre-Kindergarten program	10
November 2013	Charles Bell Elementary, Asheville	Kindergarten class	17
	Emma School, Asheville	Kindergarten classes	16
March 2014	Odyssey Community School, Asheville	4 th – 8 th grades science	13
	Asheville Catholic School, Asheville	Kindergarten	11
	Odyssey Community School, Asheville	2 nd and 3 rd grades	11
April 2014	Asheville Catholic School, Asheville	6 th – 8 th grades math	18
	Cub Scout Pack 14, Barnardsville	1 st – 4 th grades	6

Date	Organization	Audience	Approx. # of Attendees
	Cub Scout Pack 3, Asheville	1 st – 5 th grades	16
	Rainbow Community School	7 th – 8 th grades science	20
	Boy Scout Troop 15, Weaverville	6 th – 12 th grades	25
	Cub Scout Pack 72, Skyland	1 st – 5 th grades	18
	Emmanuel Lutheran School	Kindergarten – 3 rd grade	55
	Cub Scout Pack 77, Asheville	Kindergarten – 3 rd grade	9
	Rainbow Community School	5 th grade	20
			Total 461

2014: Wilderness, Other Designated Areas and Scenery

Wilderness and Designated Areas

The 2012 planning rule directs forests to identify and evaluate lands that may be suitable for inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System (NWPS) and determine whether to recommend any such lands for wilderness designation.

A meeting covering the Initial Inventory of potential additions to Wilderness and Designated Areas was held on April 17, 2014 in Asheville, NC with a total attendance of 75. The meeting began with a presentation that provided information on the current designated wildernesses, the 2012 planning rule requirements, and the seven-step process that the interdisciplinary team used to identify areas in the initial inventory. Following the presentation, meeting participants were divided into small group discussions with a goal of getting people engaged and to recognize where there are similarities and differences with how people perceive wilderness. The small group discussions then focused on each of the seven process steps that were used to identify areas in the inventory. Following the discussions, the public had the opportunity to provide area-specific comments on maps which were posted on walls around the room.

The afternoon of the meeting was focused on designated areas other than wilderness. These include special interest areas, research natural areas, experimental forests, Cradle of Forestry, as well as others. A presentation included information on designated areas in the current forest plan and an explanation of the proposed criteria that the Forest Service will be using to evaluate proposals for new designated areas in the revised forest plan. Following the presentation, small group discussions were focused around the proposed criteria for evaluating designated areas. Forest-wide maps were provided for each small group and individuals were invited to identify places on the map that should be considered for designation in the revised forest plan, as well as existing designated areas that should be modified or reevaluated for designation.

Scenery Inventory

The Need for Change process identified a need to update to the Scenery Management System, which has been the agency standard for two decades. To describe this process, a drop-in session was held during the morning and afternoon to provide information on the updated system and gather input on the initial scenery inventory. A self-view presentation was available to provide the background context for scenery

management. Large scale maps were available for each ranger district with the initial scenery concern levels. Forest Service personnel were available to answer questions and provide additional information to interested individuals. Following the workshop, the PowerPoint presentations, inventory process steps, and inventory maps were posted on the forest's plan revision website.

Additional opportunity to comment on the wilderness inventory process, designated areas, and scenery inventory was invited through May 15, 2014.

2014: Wildlife Habitat, Ecosystem Integrity and Diversity, Wild and Scenic Rivers (WSR) 2014

A meeting on Wildlife Habitat, Ecosystem Integrity and Diversity, and Wild and Scenic Rivers was held in Asheville, NC, on July 10, 2014, with a total attendance of 124. The creation, quality, and amount of early successional wildlife was a substantial issue that was raised during the March and April scoping period. Additionally, the consideration of ecosystem integrity and diversity and how to establish these in the revised forest plan was a topic of concern. The morning session focused on wildlife habitat diversity and began with a presentation of information on how the forest is using public comment and best available science to inform how the revised forest plan may address wildlife habitat creation. Following the presentation, participants were invited to identify specific areas on ranger district maps "that are important to you or that you think should be highlighted for specific management or species."

The afternoon session focused on ecosystem integrity and diversity. Attendees were provided background information on the historical context of ecosystem drivers and stressors in the southern Appalachians. A hypothetical watershed was used to provide the context for discussing tools that can be useful for evaluating ecosystem integrity. Some example management scenarios were presented and the public was asked to share their suggestions for management opportunities that might address a range of public perspectives. This was a facilitated large group discussion and public comments were recorded. Additionally, a poster presentation on wild and scenic rivers was available for question and comment.

2014: Preliminary Plan Pieces

In October and November 2014, the forest held six public meetings to present the public with preliminary information for the proposed Forest Plan for the Nantahala and Pisgah National Forests. Each meeting was in the vicinity of one of the six ranger districts at the following locations:

Meeting location	Date	Approximate number of public attendees
Robbinsville, NC	11/06/2014	27
Murphy, NC	10/30/2014	44
Franklin, NC	10/28/2014	54
Mars Hill, NC	11/03/2014	70
Mills River, NC	10/21/2014	81
Marion, NC	11/13/2014	80
		Total 356

All information shared at the public meetings was draft and intended to provide context for the revised forest plan to which the public could respond. Each meeting was initiated with a presentation that provided an update on the revision timeline, context for how issues were developed, draft management area descriptions, and forest-wide desired conditions. An update on the wilderness inventory and evaluation process was provided as well as a brief tutorial on how to use the online Collaborative Mapping Tool that was made available on November 14 for the evaluation of land that may be suitable for inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System. Following the presentation, there was a question and answer period with Forest Service staff. The remainder of the public meeting was an open format to allow individuals an opportunity to review information that was presented on posters and maps.

Information presented on posters at each of the meetings included the following:

- Draft management area framework and approximate acres
- Draft forest-wide desired condition statements
- Draft list of priority watersheds for restoration
- Recreation: Place-based settings
- Draft management area maps
- Proposed additions to Special Interest Areas

2015: Wild and Scenic River Evaluation and Revised Wilderness Inventory

As a requirement of the Nantahala and Pisgah forest plan revision process, the forest identified and evaluated lands that may be suitable for inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System, prior to analyzing the effects of recommending (or not recommending) any such lands for wilderness designation. The Forest must also identify eligibility of rivers for inclusion in the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System.

Public meetings were held to provide an update on these processes and share how public input has been used to date; to provide an opportunity for the public to have discussions with Forest Service staff and one another, on these evaluation processes; and to let people know how to best share information throughout these processes.

Meeting location	Date	Approximate number of public attendees
Franklin, NC	11/9/2015	58
Asheville, NC	11/16/2015	158
		Total: 216

2016: Initial Forestwide Plan Direction Including Plan Components

Meetings were held in 2016 to discuss initial forestwide plan direction, including versions of desired conditions, standards, and guidelines for each forestwide section. In summer 2016, an initial set of forestwide objectives was released, along with the rationale behind the objectives. The meetings allowed input on these developing plan pieces.

Meeting location	Date	Approximate number of public attendees
Robbinsville, NC	09/22/2016	20
Murphy, NC	09/27/2016	9
Franklin, NC	09/15/2016	57
Mars Hill, NC	10/13/2016	28
Mills River, NC	10/12/2016	23
Marion, NC	10/06/2016	21
		Total: 158

2017: Geographic Areas and Management Areas

The forest held open houses across the Nantahala and Pisgah National Forests to provide the public with opportunities to learn about preliminary plan building blocks of the management area and geographic area chapters and talk with Forest Service staff about local issues. The open houses allowed the public to talk directly with Forest Service staff one-on-one. Each district open house highlighted the areas within that district. District rangers and members of the Forest Plan revision team were available to discuss the materials.

Meeting location	Date	Approximate number of public attendees
Robbinsville, NC	07/25/2017	12
Brasstown, NC	08/08/2017	53
Franklin, NC	07/11/2017	70
Mars Hill, NC	07/25/2017	120
Pisgah Forest, NC	07/13/2017	128
Morganton, NC	06/29/2017	45
		Total: 428

2016-2017: Open Interdisciplinary Team Meetings

There were eight interdisciplinary team meetings between April 2016 and August 2017 that were attended by 22 members of the public. Input was gathered through October 2017 and used during the EIS Analysis.

2017-2019: Development of Proposed Forest Plan and Draft Environmental Impact Statement

National forest lands belong to all Americans. Members of the public were welcomed to participate in the above activities. As such, opportunities to attend those meetings and digital gatherings were widely advertised on the forest and partner websites, listserv, social and traditional media, through paper flyers, and word of mouth. Attention was paid to include diverse, non-traditional audiences through several local organizations.

From fall 2017 to fall 2019, the comments and input that had already been provided were incorporated into edits to the proposed plan, the development of the Environmental Impact Statement range of alternatives, and the analysis of effects. The Forest Service did not host public involvement meetings during this time, rather, staff presented on forest plan revision efforts at myriad of events hosted by others and offered updates via social media as listed below and in the following sections.

Date	Event/Audience	Approx. # of Attendees
June 2017	Cold Mountain Music Festival Booth	100
	Transylvania Natural Resources Council	30
November 2017	Forest Service "Thankful for You!" video posted to forest website	Social media
	Forest Service Thank You email to listserv	email
January 2018	Area 1 Soil and Water Conservation District Education Meeting- 6 counties plus area leads	10
March 2018	Mountain True panel, Sylva	75
	Mountain True panel, Boone	70
	Envirothon Regional Competition Advisors Training Envirothon Team Advisors	20
	Mountain True panel, Brevard	220
	Mountain True panel, Andrews	35
April 2018	State Envirothon teacher advisors- 6 th -12 th grades	30
July 2018	Forest Service Animated Video Update posted to forest website	Social media
August 2018	I Heart Pisgah Kids Rally	100
November 2018	Mars Hill University students	20
December 2018	Pathways to Parks Director and interns	3
April 2019	BCHA National Board meeting	130
May 2019	May the Forest Be with You, Cradle of Forestry event- booth and presentation	200

Date	Event/Audience	Approx. # of Attendees
June 2019	Outdoor Economy Panel WCU UNC-TV	Television
September 2019	Everybody's Environment Emerging Leaders' Summit presentation	12
	Cherokee Archaeology Conference- booth and presentation	70
October 2019	Outdoor Economy Conference booth	500
	Annual Indian Fair Tribal Elder's Day booth	200
		Total participants 1695

Additionally, the Forest Service attended regular meetings of the three primary collaborative groups and other meetings, by request and as noted in the Ongoing Involvement section below.

Ongoing Involvement from Collaboratives, Governments, and Tribes

Collaboratives

Stakeholders eagerly awaited the Nantahala and Pisgah revision for years leading up to the 2013 launch of the revision process and formed collaboratives even prior to its start.

The Forest Restoration Steering Team for the Nantahala and Pisgah National Forests was established in 2008 for the purpose of discussing ecological restoration opportunities on the National Forest and the team met a few times each year. This group anticipated serving as a collaborative during forest plan revision, but meetings were put on hiatus shortly after other forest plan collaboratives emerged.

The Nantahala-Pisgah Forest Partnership (Partnership) originated in 2012 by interested NGOs who wanted to form a collaborative on a Forest that is an early adopter of the 2012 Planning Rule and of local interest. They specifically aimed to benefit all of their identified interest areas, including: Recreation, Forest Products, Water, Conservation, Wildlife, Economic Development, and Cultural Heritage. The group has met nearly monthly plus Leadership Team and small working group meetings when needed throughout the process.

The Fish and Wildlife Conservation Council (Council) is an association of sportsmen's groups and individual sportsmen and women from western North Carolina. The group was formed over 20 years ago to provide a voice for wildlife and sportsmen on issues relating to the National Forests. The Council was revived around 2013 to be involved in the forest plan revision process. The Council has met on a regular basis throughout the process and has brought together many local and some regional and national wildlife clubs and organizations along with consulting with the North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission to address wildlife concerns in the plan revision process.

In late 2014 after an initial management area framework was shared by the Forest Service, interests between these two collaboratives polarized, especially around issues of recommended wilderness and acres of active management.

In April 2015, the Forest brought stakeholders together to help create a more constructive path forward, addressing existing tensions between collaborative groups. The Forest asked the National Forest

Foundation, the federally designated non-profit partner of the Forest Service, to assist in bringing the competing interests to one collaborative table forming the Stakeholders Forum for the Nantahala and Pisgah Forest Plan Revision (Forum). Membership was decided by an initial group of interested collaborators with the intent of including representation of all interests. The Council is a member of the Forum, along with many member organizations of the Partnership, though the Partnership is not represented as a separate organization by their choice. The National Forest Foundation continued to facilitate the Forum throughout the process to submitting comments on the proposed forest plan and draft EIS. The Forum is focused on working on the plan revision process to the final plan and EIS.

The collaborative groups invested countless hours to identify and nurture membership and build trust and understanding of perceived conflicting interests. They poured over drafts and building blocks of the proposed forest plan and DEIS and offered innovative solutions to address all interests. They created innovative approaches and processes to maximize their effectiveness. Their input to the Forest Service was detailed, innovative, and helped to create a more fully implementable plan. The Forest Service participated in their processes offering the agency perspective and sideboards when appropriate.

Meanwhile, the Partnership and Council continued to meet almost monthly. Between 2012 and 2016, a range of forest staff attended their meetings and addressed their concerns via phone, email, and additional meetings when needed. Though there were more than monthly meetings at times, one or more Forest Service staff attended an estimated 100 collaborative group meetings between 2012 and 2017. There were extensive additional phone, email, and other communications during those years.

The demonstrated need led the Forest Service to hire a collaboration specialist in February 2017 to assist the plan revision team. In addition, there were field trips, webinars, and presentations requested and offered to facilitate stakeholders' involvement in the process. The nearly 90 meetings listed below represent meetings of at least several collaborators and do not include the numerous meetings Forest Service specialists had with individual representatives from the collaborative groups.

Date	Organization/Audience	Approx. # of Attendees
February 2017	Stakeholder Forum (SHF) Siler Bald Wilderness session	25
	SHF Organizing Committee (OC) meeting	10
	Fish and Wildlife Conservation Council (FWCC) meeting	30
March 2017	Nantahala Pisgah Forest Partnership (NPFP) meeting	29
	SHF OC meeting; deeper dive meetings with representatives	12
	FWCC meeting; deeper dive meetings with representatives	16
April 2017	SHF meeting, SHF OC meeting	35
	FWCC meeting	15
May 2017	SHF webinar on draft Management and Geographic Areas, OC meeting	20
	FWCC meeting	15
June 2017	SHF Restoration field trip	10
July 2017	FWCC- 2 meetings	30

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Date	Organization/Audience	Approx. # of Attendees
	NPFP meeting	25
	SHF OC meeting; 4 Geographic Area meetings; 4 small group work	40
	SHF FS present webinar on Suitability	26
August 2017	SHF FS present Old Growth deep dive meeting	10
	NPFP- 2 meetings, deeper dive meetings with representatives	28
	FWCC meeting	15
	SHF meeting- special topics	35
September 2017	SHF meeting, OC meeting	45
	NPFP- 2 meetings; deeper dive meeting with representatives	30
October 2017	NPFP meeting	25
	SHF meeting; OC meeting	25
	FWCC meeting	15
	SHF State Natural Heritage Program info session	12
	SHF FS present Scenery deep dive meeting	20
November 2017	SHF meeting; Sawmill Tour field trip; outreach to counties	50
	NPFP meeting	25
December 2017	SHF OC meeting	10
February 2018	NPFP meeting	25
	FWCC meeting	15
March 2018	FWCC meeting	12
	NPFP involved in Mountain True's 4 public panel discussions	Contacts included above
April 2018	FWCC Open House for the public	25
May 2018	NPFP meeting	25
	SHF OC meeting	10
June 2018	NPFP meeting	25
July 2018	SHF OC meeting	10
September 2018	NPFP meeting	25
	SHF meeting	25
October 2018	FWCC meeting	15
December 2018	SHF field trip; Integrator Team (IT) meeting	25
	NPFP meeting	25
	FWCC meeting	15

Date	Organization/Audience	Approx. # of Attendees
January 2019	SHF IT meeting	10
February 2019	FWCC meeting	12
	SHF IT meeting	10
	NPFP meeting, Leadership Team meeting with Forest Supervisor	22
March 2019	NPFP meeting	25
	FWCC meeting	15
	SHF IT meeting	10
April 2019	SHF/FS present at BCHA National Public Lands Workshop	Contacts included above
	NPFP meeting	25
	FWCC Meeting of Legislators	30
	Notice of addition to the website of data and white papers they and others requested	42
May 2019	NPFP meeting	25
June 2019	SHF OC meeting	10
July 2019	NPFP meeting	25
August 2019	NPFP meeting	25
September 2019	NPFP meeting	25
	FWCC meeting	15
October 2019	NPFP meeting	25
	SHF OC meeting	10
	FWCC meeting	15
November 2019	NPFP meeting	25
December 2019	NPFP meeting	25
	SHF OC/IT meeting	15
	Total participants	1359

Numerous stakeholders were involved in more than one collaborative group and have provided extensive input through their groups. Dozens of stakeholders have provided hundreds of hours of input on the process, working toward a broadly supported and implementable plan.

Government Involvement

Intergovernmental coordination results in more robust forest plans that better meet the needs of government entities, including the Forest Service. As a result of this coordination, governments can more effectively use limited resources, staffs, and budgets, as they work cooperatively to manage forest

resources on lands across multiple jurisdictions. The Forest Service regularly meets with other Federal and State agencies in the interest of sound and collaborative resource management and often as required by Federal law or forest guidance. See details below.

Additionally, the Forest Service regularly meets with staffs of Senator Tillis, Senator Burr, and Representatives Meadows/Cawthorn and McHenry on activities of interest to their constituents. We also meet with the Governor's western representative and other State officials.

The collaborative role of State and local governments in the planning process is unique. The opportunity for government involvement throughout the planning process is essential to the successful development and implementation of the Nantahala and Pisgah Forest Plan, and is also required by the 2012 Planning Rule.

The 2012 Planning Rule requires a review of planning and land use policies of federally recognized Indian Tribes (43 U.S.C. 1712(b)), other Federal agencies, and State and local governments, where relevant to the plan area. The purpose of this review is to foster greater recognition and discussion of issues that have cross-boundary effects, look for common objectives and solutions, and find opportunities to integrate management across landscapes. That review is documented in Appendix G. Here in Appendix H, the discussion focuses on meetings and coordination that happened between the Forest Service and stakeholders.

The following lists the engagement of government entities in the plan revision process.

Counties

The Nantahala and Pisgah National Forests are divided into 6 ranger districts located within 18 counties in western North Carolina. Each county is represented by a County Commission composed of 4-7 elected county commissioners and additional county managers and staff. District rangers interact with these elected officials and staff through a variety of means: emails, phone calls, and in-person meetings and discussions. The 18 counties within the Nantahala and Pisgah National Forests were contacted 90 times between October 2015 and August 2016, including 18 in-person meetings, 31 phone calls (+ voice mails), and 41 emails. There continues to be regular contact between district rangers and county officials.

Total number of ranger district interactions by county office October 2015-August 2016:

County	Ranger District	Number of Interactions
Buncombe	Appalachian/ Pisgah	4
Madison	Appalachian	5
Mitchell	Appalachian	3
Yancey	Appalachian	10
Graham	Cheoah	14
Swain	Cheoah/ Nantahala	7
Avery	Grandfather/ Appalachian	5
Burke	Grandfather	3
Caldwell	Grandfather	3

County	Ranger District	Number of Interactions
McDowell	Grandfather	4
Jackson	Nantahala	5
Macon	Nantahala/Tusquitee	15
Haywood	Pisgah/ Appalachian	6
Henderson	Pisgah	0
Transylvania	Pisgah/ Nantahala	5
Watauga	Grandfather	2
Cherokee	Tusquitee	5
Clay	Tusquitee	5
		Total: 101

Additionally, the Forest Supervisor reached out to counties in 2017 and again in 2020, directly offering to meet to hear of their interests and concerns related to national forest lands along with providing them an opportunity to discuss forest plan revision efforts. In 2017, 14 of the 18 counties responded, offering input and insights about their interests. This is not inclusive of meetings between district staff and county officials discussing topics other than the forest plan revision efforts.

Date	County	# participants	Details
March 2017	Graham County meeting	3	Econ Development Dir
April 2017	McDowell County/Forest Supervisor meeting	2	County Manager and Commissioner
	Cherokee County/Forest Supervisor meeting	3	County Manager and Commissioners
	Clay County/Forest Supervisor meeting	3	County Manager and Commissioners
	Graham County/Forest Supervisor meeting	2	County Commissioners
	Haywood County/Forest Supervisor meeting	2	County Manager and Emergency Management Director
	Henderson County/Forest Supervisor meeting	1	County Manager
June 2017	Transylvania Natural Resources Council (TNRC)	20	Addressed Council, guests at monthly meeting
	Macon County/Forest Supervisor meeting	3	County Manager and Commissioners
July 2017	Open house invitations to county	72	County Manager and Commissioners

Date	County	# participants	Details
	representatives		
	Jackson County/Forest Supervisor meeting	3	County Manager and Commissioners
	Caldwell County/Forest Supervisor meeting	1	County Manager
	Swain County/Forest Supervisor meeting	3	County Manager and Commissioners
October 2017	Avery County/Forest Supervisor meeting	2	County Manager and Commissioner
	Outreach meeting of Stakeholder Forum	24	Graham, Transylvania, SW Commission
November 2017	Madison County/Forest Supervisor meeting	1	County Commissioner
January 2018	District 1 Soil and Water Conservation District Educators meeting	14	Clay, Henderson, Haywood, Swain, Jackson, Madison; Bill Yarborough, Bd of Supervisors; Davis Ferguson, Western Regional Chair
March 2018	TNRC	20	FS and Climate Change, including FPR
May 2018	Yancey County/Forest Supervisor meeting	2	County Manager and Commissioner
July 2018	Letter to 18 counties and approx 40 municipalities	72	Reconnect and request for plans for review
November 2018	TNRC	20	David and Josh presenting on FPR
May 2019	Communications regarding the review of other government plans	20	Communications with numerous local government representatives to coordinate development of Appendix G of the DEIS

Councils of Government

There are five Councils of Government (COG) in the forest plan area. They are designated by both State and Federal governments as the official agency for the administration of various funds and programs. COGs provide services and resources which might not otherwise be affordable or available to local governments. They serve as technical, economic, and planning resources for their areas and administer regional projects and programs.

The majority of the eighteen counties in the forest plan area are represented by three COGs. The Southwestern Commission includes Cherokee, Clay, Graham, Haywood, Jackson, Macon, and Swain Counties and the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians. Land of Sky Regional Council includes Buncombe, Henderson, Madison, and Transylvania Counties. High Country COG includes Avery, Mitchell, Watauga, and Yancey Counties within the forest planning area. The Western Piedmont COG includes Burke and

Caldwell Counties, and the Isothermal Planning and Development Commission includes McDowell County within the planning area.

The Forest reached out to the three primary COGs for the planning area, meeting and communicating with them on numerous occasions listed below. Additionally, the WPCOG and IPDC interests were also referenced during the planning process.

Date	Entity	Details
May 2017	Land of Sky and Southwestern Commission Council of Governments meeting	Director of Economic and Community Development and Executive Director
November 2017	Presentation to Southwestern Commission Council of Governments	7 western counties; Nantahala, Cheoah, Tusquitee
July 2018	County Engagement Letter	Update on the process copied to COGs
May 2019	Mountain West Partnership meeting	5-county Economic Development Directors meeting
October 2019	Land of Sky Board of Directors meeting	Offered preview of upcoming draft materials
January 2020	Email to counties notifying of upcoming release of drafts and offer to meet	Invitation to COGs to join the meetings
	Notice to Councils of Governments of upcoming release of drafts	Offered a preview for each COG and inclusion in county preview meetings

State Agencies

The Forest Service has worked closely with the **NC Wildlife Resources Commission (NCWRC)** on the development of plan objectives and management area boundaries, incorporating wildlife needs. The Commission's Species of Greatest Conservation Need list was incorporated into the forest wildlife analysis and in developing the Forest Service list of Species of Conservation Concern. The NCWRC is an active member in the Forum and Council. Relevant NCWRC management plans were reviewed to facilitate complimentary actions in the forest plan when possible (See Appendix G).

The Forest also worked with the **NC Forest Service** on topics such as prescribed burns and shortleaf pine restoration. They are involved in an all-lands implementation strategy to ensure U.S. Forest Service implementation meets shared priorities of the forest plan and their State Forest Action Plan. Relevant NCFS management plans were reviewed to facilitate complimentary actions in the forest plan when possible (See Appendix G).

The Forest Service has worked with the **NC Heritage Program (NCHP)** on managing around state recognized rare plant communities. The Forest Service used information provided by the Natural Heritage Program to inform management area allocation and develop plan components that emphasize coordination with the Natural Heritage Program. NCHP staff presented to the Stakeholders' Forum to increase knowledge and understanding of their program as relates to the forest plan revision process.

The **NC Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, Agricultural Programs**, has been represented and has provided input to the Forum and provided additional comments directly to the

Forest Service. Relevant NC Department of Agriculture management plans were reviewed to facilitate complimentary actions in the forest plan when possible (See Appendix G).

Federal Agencies

The Forest has coordinated with adjacent national forests, including the Cherokee National Forest, George Washington-Jefferson National Forests, Francis Marion and Sumter National Forests, and the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forests on cross-boundary issues such as management of rivers, trails, management areas, and resource topics that span across state boundaries.

The Forest also worked with the **National Park Service**, including the Blue Ridge Parkway, the Great Smoky Mountain National Park, and the National Scenic Trail and National Historic Trail offices on cross boundary and adjacent lands initiatives. Management for the Blue Ridge Parkway and Great Smoky Mountains National Park were reviewed to facilitate complimentary actions in the forest plan when possible (See Appendix G).

The Forest is working with the **U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS)** on the plan as it relates to effects on threatened and endangered species. USFWS has been involved in the development of the species of conservation concern list, development of plan components, and the analysis of impacts to species.

Cooperating Agency: Bureau of Land Management

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) is the cooperating agency in the Nantahala and Pisgah National Forest plan revision because the agency has legal jurisdiction over the Federal mineral estate underlying the Nantahala and Pisgah National Forests. The BLM has cooperating agency status to provide information and special expertise related to subsurface mineral resources. The Forest Service is not making an oil and gas availability decision in this forest plan.

Federally Recognized Native American Tribes

The following federally recognized Native American Tribes have an interest in the Nantahala and Pisgah National Forests:

- Alabama-Coushatta Tribe of Texas
- Alabama-Quassarte Tribal Town
- Catawba Indian Nation
- Cherokee Nation
- Coushatta Tribe of Louisiana
- Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians
- Kialegee Tribal Town
- Muscogee (Creek) Nation
- Poarch Band of Creek Indians
- Thlopthlocco Tribal Town
- United Keetoowah Band of Cherokee Indians
- Shawnee Tribe

These Tribes have had an opportunity to engage in the Assessment and Plan and EIS development, notified by letter. Input from formal consultation has been integral to the development of the Tribal

Resources and Cultural Resources sections of the Plan, along with the Heritage Corridors Management Area, Geographic Areas chapter, among others.

In addition, the forest planner has attended the annual To Bridge A Gap meetings between Federal agencies and Tribes. To Bridge A Gap was established in 2001 to strengthen government-to-government relationships between the Forest Service and federally recognized tribal governments on a variety of cultural and natural resource management issues. It is an official government-to-government meeting funded by all parties, where there are mutual interests in managing archaeological, natural, or cultural resources of the Forests.

Date	Attendees	Location/ Source	Topic
November 2012	Executives of 11 Tribes	Email	Initial plan revision correspondence with tribes
May 2013	Tribal Historic Preservation Office of Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians	Cherokee, NC	Plan revision introduction
January 2014	Tribal Executives and Staff of Catawba Tribe	Rock Hill, SC	Plan revision introduction NFsNC and FM
May 2014	Tribal Staff, Natural Resources of Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians	Cherokee, NC	Plan discussion, issues discussion and open house
June 2014	Tribal Historic Preservation Office of Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians	Cherokee, NC	Mapping significant locations
July 2014	Tribal Historic Preservation Office of Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians	Cherokee, NC	Refining significant locations maps
November 2014	Tribal Historic Preservation Office of United Keetoowah Band	Email	Shared locations maps
December 2014	Executives of Muscogee Creek Nation	Email	1920/1560 Plan update and request for comments
November 2016	Executives of 11 Tribes	US Mail	Draft MA Heritage Corridors
	Tribal Historic Preservation Offices of 11 Tribes	Email	Draft MA Heritage Corridors
January 2017	Executives of 11 Tribes	US mail	Draft S&Gs
	Tribal Historic Preservation Offices of 11 Tribes	Email	Draft S&Gs
February 2017	To Bridge a Gap Meeting	Tulsa, OK	Newest S&Gs, MA4C, overview, request for comments
June 2017	Tribal Historic Preservation Offices of 11 Tribes	Email	Plan updates GAs & MAs request for input
	Executives of 11 Tribes	US Mail	Plan updates GAs & MAs offer conference call / meeting

Date	Attendees	Location/ Source	Topic
September 2017	Tribal Executives, Staff and Tribal members of Cherokee Nation, Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians and United Keetoowah Band of Cherokee Indians	Cherokee, NC	Plan updates
April 2018	Tribal Historic Preservation Office of Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians	Murphy, NC	Refining significant locations maps
	Tribal Historic Preservation Office of Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians	Asheville, NC	SIAs - Areas of Tribal Interest
May 2018	To Bridge a Gap Meeting	Tulsa, OK	The Forest hosted a breakout session to discuss plan revision, Trail of Tears management, and other topics
July 2018	Tribal Historic Preservation Office of Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians	Cullowhee, NC	Refining significant locations maps
September 2018	Tribal Executives, Staff and Tribal members of Cherokee Nation, Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians and United Keetoowah Band of Cherokee Indians	Cherokee, NC	Plan updates
April 2019	To Bridge a Gap Meeting	Wyandotte, OK	The Forest hosted a breakout session to discuss plan revision, Trail of Tears management, and other topics
May 2019	Tribal Historic Preservation Office of Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians	Cherokee, NC	Refining significant locations maps, SIAs – Areas of Tribal Interest
September 2019	Tribal Learning Exchange with Forest Service and representatives from Alabama-Quassarte, Cherokee Nation, Coushatta Tribe of Louisiana, Eastern Band of Cherokee, Muscogee (Creek) Nation, Thlopthlocco, United Keetoowah Band of Cherokee	Murphy, NC	Discussion about forest management
	Cherokee Archaeological Symposium	Cherokee, NC	Display and panel discussion on the forest plan revision
October 2019	Tribal Elders Information Fair	Cherokee, NC	Display and representation on forest plan revision
October 2020	Tribal Historic Preservation Office of Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians	virtual	Formal consultation

Date	Attendees	Location/ Source	Topic
November 2020	Tribal Historic Preservation Office of Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians	virtual	Formal consultation

2020: Release of Proposed Forest Plan and Draft Environmental Impact Statement and Formal Comment Period

The proposed plan and Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) were released on February 14, 2020, initiating a 90-day comment period. In preparation for the release, briefings and information sessions were offered to Forest Service employees and legislators kicking off the new year. The Forest Service also reached out to all 18 counties prior to the draft release and scheduled meetings with 12 counties during the first month of the rollout, with the other six counties being scheduled. Copies of the proposed plan, DEIS, appendices, and Readers Guides were ordered to be provided to each ranger district office, each county office and 25 libraries across the planning area recommended by the councils of government to provide the broadest access for public review. In addition, digital copies were also provided to counties for optional access. Seven face-to-face public open houses were planned across the planning area within the first month and a half of the release of the drafts along with presentations by request. Additional avenues were being pursued to assure outreach efforts were inclusive of all demographics and interests in the planning area. Below is referenced the initial efforts made to inform the public of the proposals and supporting documents.

After approximately the first 30 days of the comment period, the world was thrust into the Covid-19 pandemic. The Forest Service transitioned to virtual options for reaching interested citizens. As with many Forest Service landscapes across the country, many of the planning area communities are in rural areas with limited connectivity. Extensive consideration was focused on how to replace the in-person open houses with meaningful, accessible, and appealing alternatives. The planning team reviewed the original outreach plan and substituted virtual options for each audience and need. As noted below, the open houses were replaced with a virtual online open house including the information that would have been shared and organized as would have been available in a face-to-face open house. Additionally, public conference calls were scheduled to provide an opportunity to interact with Forest Service specialists and leadership, allowing members of the public to ask questions and gain a greater understanding of the proposals. In a further attempt to include the rural voices and interests, additional conference calls were scheduled for local elected officials and county staff.

Forest Service staff also continued to virtually meet with collaborative groups numerous times per month, addressing their concerns and those heard through the virtual open houses. Supporting materials were added to the website by request and to aid in answering questions raised. Numerous calls and presentations were created to address public request and iterative conversations held to drill down to greater understanding of the complexities involved with the level of environmental analysis required for a forest plan revision of this complexity.

During the month and a half leading up and through the comment period, and the 135-day comment period itself, the Forest Service engaged in heavy outreach reaching more than 15,000 outreach contacts, plus countless contacts through social and traditional media outlets. Hundreds of conversations and communications with individuals took place, including public and virtual meetings, meetings with county and government elected officials, collaborators, and other presentations by request. Details are shown below. This level of effort during a five-month period illustrates the commitment of the Forest Service to truly collaborate on and communicate about the forest plan revision process.

Forest Service Public Outreach 2020

Month	Action	# attended
January	Nantahala and Pisgah forest plan revision Reader's Guide updated, distributed, and posted to forest website	100
	Internal briefings at ranger districts and USFS Southern Research Station	140
	Geographic Areas Story Map posted to forest website	Social media
	Briefing with state legislator staff	3
February	Management Area Story Map posted to web	Social media
	Letter to state partners and tribes announcing upcoming release	Postal and email
	Federal Register Notice of Availability (NOA)	Print media
	Legal Notice	Print media
Feb 14, 2020	Drafts released to the public with media release	Print media, social media, listserv (12,000)
	Deep Dive Webinar: Fire and Q&A posted to forest website	Social media
March	Announcement of Upcoming Public Open Houses	Print media, social media, listserv
	Grandfather Ranger District Open House	40
	Deep Dive Webinar: Recreation and Access and Q&A posted to forest website	Social media
	Deep Dive Webinar: Species Analysis and Q&A posted to forest website	Social media
	Comment period update	Print media, social media, listserv
	Comment period extension announcement	Print media, social media, listserv
April	Everybody's Environment	9
	Deep Dive Webinar: Timber posted to forest website	Social media
	Geospatial datasets for DEIS posted to forest website	Social media
	Scenic Class Inventory data and description posted to forest website	Social media
	Guide to web-based interactive maps developed and posted to forest website	Social media
	Deep Dive webinar: Overview posted to forest website	Social media
	Scenic Class Inventory data and description posted to forest website	Social media

	Potentially Suitable Timber data and description posted to forest website	Social media
	Potentially Operable Timber data and description posted to forest website	Social media
	Priority Watersheds, Wild and Scenic Rivers, Special Interest Areas, Scenic Class Inventory, Potentially Suitable Timber, and Potentially Operable Lands shapefiles posted to forest website	Social media
	Deep Dive webinar: Special Interest Areas and Natural Areas posted to forest website	Social media
	Deep Dive webinar: Wilderness and Wild and Scenic Rivers posted to forest website	Social media
	Deep Dive webinar: Old Growth posted to forest website	Social media
	The first of 5 discussions with North Carolina Geological Survey and USGS	
May	Discussion with BLM	5
	Media release: Notice of comment period extension and virtual open houses	Print media
	Notification of comment period extension to State and Federal legislators	7
	Notification of comment period extension to collaborators	45
	Readers Guide mailed to listserv postal list	300
	Deep Dive Q&A Webinar: Timber Calculations posted to forest website	Social media
	Federal Register Notice for comment period extension	Print media
	Legal Notice	Print media
	Deep Dive Q&A Webinar: SIAs, Wilderness and WSR posted to forest website	Social media
	Notification of comment period extension to NC state agencies and legislators	5
	Virtual Open House forest website launched	Social media
	Deep Dive Q&A Webinar: Old Growth posted to forest website	Social media
	Public Question and Answer fluid document posted to forest website	Social media
	Email reminder of virtual open house calls to SHF, FWCC, NPFP, and counties	115
	Virtual Open House Public Q&A session, 1 of 4	16
June	Identification of Canopy Gap and Early Successional Habitat Patches white paper posted to forest website	Social media
	Email reminder of virtual open house calls to SHF, FWCC, NPFP, and counties	115
	Virtual Open House Public Q&A session, 2 of 4	7
	Process for Establishing the NRV white paper posted to forest website	Social media
	Virtual Open House Public Q&A session, 3 of 4	12
	Virtual Open House Public Q&A session, 4 of 4	33
	Spectrum Analysis: Young Gaps white paper posted to forest website	Social media
	Discussion with SHPO	2
	Total contacts (not including media contacts)	12,954

Forest Engagement by Request 2020

January	FWCC Pisgah Wildlife Day	30
February	UNC Asheville Wildlife Class presentation	20
	Media interviews, newspaper, radio, magazines: Blue Ridge Public Radio articles Smokey Mountain News articles Carolina Public Press articles Asheville Citizen Times article Transylvania Times articles WLOS articles and television spot High Country Press article	Traditional media
	Carolina Public Press Panel Discussion	100
March	Soil and Water Conservation District, Area 1 Spring Meeting	150
	Elisha Mitchell Audubon Society	97
	The Nature Conservancy	20
	Media coverage: Carolina Public Press article Asheville Citizen Times article Mountain Xpress	Traditional media
April	Mountain True Information Session FS presentation	143
	Prescribed fire deeper dive discussion	5
	Climbing Community discussion	5
	TNC Hosted SPECTRUM Discussion	6
	Media coverage: Carolina Public Press article Asheville Citizen Times article	Traditional media
May	USFS EMC-Public Engagement presentation	30
	USFS EMC-Public Engagement presentation	30
	USFS EMC-Public Engagement FPR Tasks workshop	25
	The Understory Radio Interview	Radio
	Mountain Mornings with Mayor Harry Vaughn and Patrick Malone interview	Radio
June	I Heart Pisgah and SHF IT meeting on proposals for Craggy Mountains	8
	Media coverage: WNC Magazine feature	Traditional media

	Carolina Public Press article Asheville Citizen Times article The Mountaineer	
	Total contacts (not including media contacts)	669

County, Councils of Government, and Legislators Engagement 2020

January	Letter to County Commission board chair, manager, and select staff notifying of upcoming release of drafts and offer to meet	72
	Email to all county commissioners notifying of upcoming release of drafts and offer to meet	75
	Congressional staff briefings	2
	Representative Meadows office briefing	4
	Notice to Councils of Governments of upcoming release of drafts	5
February	Yancey County rollout preview meeting	8
	Haywood County rollout preview meeting	3
	Mitchell County rollout preview meeting	3
	McDowell County rollout preview meeting	5
	Macon County rollout preview meeting	4
	Buncombe County rollout preview meeting	5
	Jackson County rollout preview meeting	5
	Transylvania County rollout preview meeting	4
	Graham County Board of Commissioners rollout preview meeting	8
	Transylvania County Board of Commissioners Meeting	25
March	Haywood County Board of Commissioners Meeting	15
May	"Overview for Counties" video created and posted to the web	Social media
	Letter and email to counties and Councils of Government announcing virtual outreach events	152
	Discussion with Graham County	2
	County Q&A Session, 1 of 2	17
	County Q&A Session, 2 of 2	15
	Reminder of virtual open house calls	72
June	Reminder of virtual open house calls	72
	Buncombe County Board of Commissioners Meeting	10
	Total contacts (not including media contacts)	583

Collaborator Group Engagement 2020

February	Letter to collaborators announcing upcoming release	40
	Deep Dive Webinar: Fire and Q&A	26
	Stakeholder Forum (SHF) Organizing Committee/Integrator Team meeting	14
	Nantahala-Pisgah Forest Partnership (NPFP) meeting	29
	Fish and Wildlife Conservation Council (FWCC) Meeting	20
	SHF meeting	38

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	NPFP meeting	29
March	Deep Dive Webinar: Recreation and Access and Q&A	26
	SHF deeper dive conversation about species	6
	Deep Dive Webinar: Species Analysis and Q&A	23
	Deeper Dive: Rare Species analysis tool demonstration	10
	SHF Integrator Team (IT) meeting	8
	SHF IT meeting	10
	NPFP deeper dive conversation about climate change	5
	SHF Organizing Committee (OC) meeting	10
	NPFP meeting	29
April	SHF IT meeting	10
	SHF whole group meeting	25
	SHF deeper dive conversation about acreages and operability	6
	SHF Timber Integrators meeting	5
	SHF Recreation Integrators discussion with FS	6
	SHF IT meeting	8
	NPFP Econ Development meeting	10
	NPFP Water/Roads meeting	10
	NPFP Transportation components discussion with FS	7
	SHF IT meeting	10
	SHF OC meeting	10
	NPFP Ecological Restoration discussion with FS	10
	NPFP Wildlife Meeting	10
May	Deep Dive Questions and Answers Webinar: Timber Calculations	21
	Deep Dive Questions and Answers Webinar: SIAs, Wilderness and WSR	28
	NPFP deeper dive conversations about old growth	3
	SHF OC phone meeting	10
	SHF whole group meeting	25
	Deep Dive Questions and Answers Webinar: Old Growth	30
	SHF IT meeting	10
	NPFP Forest Products Meeting	12
	NPFP Special Designations Meeting	15
	SHF OC Meeting	10
	NPFP whole group meeting	25
	SHF IT meeting	10
	NPFP whole group meeting	25
June	NPFP Eco-Restoration Team Discussion	6
	NPFP deeper dive discussions on NRV and old growth	6
	SHF whole group mtg	25
	NPFP whole group meeting	29
	SHF deeper dive discussions on timber approaches	4
	NPFP Recreation discussion with FS	6
	SHF OC meeting	8
	NPFP whole group Meeting	29
	SHF IT meeting	10
	SHF whole group meeting	30

	SHF whole group mtg	30
	SHF deeper dive discussions with individuals on process	12
	FWCC meeting	15
	SHF OC and IT meeting	16
	Stakeholder Forum whole group mtg	30
	Total contacts	930

Throughout: Public Comments

In addition to the face-to-face and virtual involvement opportunities listed above, we also received comments from individuals and organization in the form of postal mail or email. Public comments help the Forest Service team understand how different people use, depend on, and appreciate the Nantahala and Pisgah National Forests. Public comments provide us with information that we may not have. Comments are used, along with Forest Service knowledge and best available science, to build a strong plan that is reflective of both community interests and best management practices.

The Forest Service is often asked how many comments we have received. We don't tally comments, because forest management input is not a voting process. And how would each be counted - does a comment from one individual get counted once, but an organization or community comment gets counted as many times as there are members or residents? Instead of focusing on the volume of comments we receive, we have encouraged the public to submit comments with detailed information about specific places and uses of the forests. Then, specialists consider these comments when writing their plan sections or completing their analyses.

Considering public comments is a shared task by the interdisciplinary team. Typically, comments are reviewed first by the NEPA specialist or forest planner and then shared with the specialists that cover the topics reflected in the comments. How they are analyzed depends on where the team is in the process when the comment is received. Here are some examples: comments received earliest in the process were useful for our assessment of current conditions; comments received on the Wilderness evaluation process were used in the inventory and evaluation of individual areas; comments that we will receive during the formal comment period of the draft Environmental Impact Statement will be responded to in a Final EIS appendix. Since the comments came at different stages, they are considered and incorporated at different points in time.

Comments themselves are multi-dimensional, describing both opinions and facts on all kinds of topics that span all Forest Service natural resource management. For example, we received comments from a landslide geologist who had recommendations for managing roads and soils in landslide prone areas. We have received input from community members about places they value and to which they want to see continued access. We have heard from individuals supporting the designation of new special areas like wilderness and heard from others that they don't want any more permanent designations. We have heard from recreationists who want clearer guidance about opportunities for rock climbing or rock collecting or national trails. We have heard from the forest products industry about ways we can support jobs in the economy, and from local woodworkers who desire sustainable harvested local wood products. We have heard from those who collect medicinal herbs for their livelihood, from biologists who want to see protections for rare species, from sportsmen and women who are concerned about wildlife habitat and diversity, and from folks who visit the forest to relax and get away...and more. Public input is as diverse as those who use and love these forests.

The formal 90-day comment period on the proposed forest plan and draft Environmental Impact Statement started with the release of the documents on February 14, 2020. On May 8, 2020, it was extended an additional 45 days due to the Covid-19 pandemic, when our initial forms of public meetings had to be redesigned. The complete 135-day comment period closed on June 29. Starting in April 2020, the planning team worked with a special Forest Service team to begin sorting and coding comments. The team coded through the spring, summer and fall until every letter had been reviewed and organized by topic.

Comments were received from more than 8,500 individuals, organizations, and governments. Ninety percent were based on form letters. The remaining 10 percent of comments had a high degree of detail from collaboratives, national and local nongovernmental organizations, business and industries, local, State, Federal and Tribal governments, and individuals. Ninety-five percent of comments were received electronically, either through CARA or a Forest Service email inbox. The remaining five percent were sent in by postal mail. Most of the comment letters received are publicly available in the online comment reading room on the Forest's plan revision website. Duplicates and comment letters that included personal identifiable information were not published in the reading room. (Unpublished letters were almost entirely form letters.)

Comments are available for review in the project record. Responses to the comments received during the formal 135-day comment period on the proposed forest plan and Draft Environmental Impact Statement are included in the Final Environmental Impact Statement, Appendix A.