Nantahala and Pisgah NFs
Wilderness Evaluation Process

October 2015
What we will cover today

- Process overview
- Nantahala and Pisgah steps to date
- Evaluation
- Your input needed
- Questions?
Process Overview
Federal Regulation:

*In developing a proposed new plan or proposed plan revision, the responsible official shall:*

…

(v) **Identify and evaluate** lands that may be suitable for inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System and determine whether to **recommend** any such lands for wilderness designation.
Process steps

- Identifying and evaluating lands that may be suitable for inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System consists of 4 primary steps:
  1. Inventory
  2. Evaluation
  3. Analysis
  4. Recommendation

- Each step requires public participation & documentation.
Step 1: Inventory

- Identify and create an inventory of all lands that may be suitable for inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System.

- Inclusion in the inventory is not a designation that conveys or requires a particular kind of management.
Step 2. Evaluation

- Evaluate the wilderness characteristics of all lands in the inventory.
  - Apparent naturalness
  - Outstanding opportunities for solitude OR for a primitive and unconfined type of recreation
  - Ecological, geological, or other features of scientific, educational, scenic, or historical value
  - Manageability to preserve its wilderness characteristics
Step 3. Analysis
Draft Environmental Impact Statement

Inventory

Evaluation

Alternative 1

Alternative 2

Alternative 3

A N A L Y S I S
Step 4. Recommendation

- The **Record of Decision** for the revised Forest Plan will include any areas to recommend for wilderness.

- Describe what management is provided for those lands that were in the inventory and evaluation **but not** included in a recommendation.
Nantahala and Pisgah NFs Process

How we got to where we are now...
Nantahala and Pisgah NFs Process

Step 1: Inventory

- **Spring 2014** - Shared version 1 maps with the public
- **Fall 2014** - shared version 2 maps, and initiated the evaluation
- **January 2015** - New agency policy was finalized
- Additional updates to the inventory
Nantahala and Pisgah NFs Process
October 2015 Inventory

- Broad and inclusive
- Includes many but not all of the areas that were recommended to consider by the public
- All inventory areas will be evaluated for wilderness characteristics
- Inventory area boundaries will likely be revised through the evaluation and analysis processes
Nantahala and Pisgah NFs Process October 2015 Inventory

- 52 areas
- Approximately 362,400 acres
- Approximately 35% of the Forest
- The inventory is \( \sim 150,000 \) acres larger than the version seen by the public in April 2014
  - Removed road buffers
  - Removed minimum width criteria (fingers of narrow ownership)
  - Includes roads that are gated and closed to the public
  - Includes vegetation treatments that can be passively restored in the future

Inclusion in inventory and evaluation does not mean that the area will be managed to maintain wilderness characteristics.
How we have used the information you provided to date?

- Inventory criteria were revised based on public input.
- Site specific information that was relevant to the inventory was incorporated into the consideration of areas.
- Some information provided during the inventory phase is in fact more relevant to the evaluation and will be considered in the context of the five evaluation criteria.
Evaluation

Where we are now
Remember: Step 2. Evaluation

- Look at all inventory areas and apply criteria to see whether they meet the intent of the Wilderness Act attributes:
  - Apparent naturalness
  - Outstanding opportunities for solitude or for a primitive and unconfined type of recreation
  - Ecological, geological, or other features of scientific, educational, scenic, or historical value
  - Manageability to preserve its wilderness characteristics
Step 2. Evaluation

- Developed evaluation questions based on public input from last Fall and final 2015 directives

- Providing blank evaluation forms to fill out

- Also have a sample area evaluation to show how questions could be answered

The sample area is provided to illustrate the type of information that we will be compiling.
Your input needed

- Review the maps and descriptions of the lands that may be suitable for inclusion in the NWPS
  - What information do you have about these areas that can help us answer the evaluation questions?
  - Be specific regarding where things occur.

Your input is important!
The evaluation will provide info to help determine which areas will be considered further in alternatives developed and analyzed in the Revised Plan’s Environmental Impact Statement.
Tools available to you

- Interactive GIS map and storyboard
GIS Storyboard – Available online

Inventory and Evaluation Process of Lands that may be Suitable for Wilderness

Inventory - Early 2014 to Summer 2015

This map represents the inventory of lands that may be suitable for inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System. The primary function of the inventory step is to efficiently, effectively, and transparently identify all lands in the planning area that may have wilderness characteristics as defined in the Wilderness Act. All inventoried areas are carried on to the next step (evaluation) for a closer look at whether the areas possess wilderness characteristics. During subsequent steps, inventoried area boundaries may change, or areas may be combined or divided.

It is important to note that areas included in the inventory themselves do not convey or require any particular land of management. Some of these areas may be considered in alternatives for the forest plan revision. Management direction for those that are inventoried but ultimately not recommended for inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System will be left to the discretion of the Responsible Official.

Using the Forest Service Handbook direction (FSH 1909.12, Chapter 70), the inventory includes forest lands that met inventory criteria on the basis of size, and did not include certain types of road or other improvements. The Islandia and Pisgah NPS inventory was developed over a year and a half, was adjusted twice in response to two rounds of public engagement in Spring 2014 and Fall 2014. It was revised again after the closure of final agency directives in early 2015. As a result of these adjustments, the October 2015 inventory is 150,000 acres larger than the first version seen by the public. 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.

Detailed discussion of the factors that led to the development of the inventory map is available in the process paper titled “Process Paper: Identifying and Evaluating Lands that may be suitable for inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System.”
Tools available to you

- Interactive GIS map and storyboard
- Detailed process paper with maps and descriptions of the inventory areas
- Wilderness evaluation questions (Evaluation Forms)
- Sample of how these questions could be applied

All of the above are available at: www.fs.usda.gov/goto/nfsnc/nprevision

Or, you may request hard copies by sending an email to NCplanrevision@fs.fed.us with the subject line: “Request for hard copy resources”
How to submit input

- Please submit input electronically:
  NCplanrevision@fs.fed.us
  with a subject line: “Wilderness evaluation input”

- Or via postal mail:
  ATTN Forest Plan Revision
  160A Zillicoa Street
  Asheville, NC 28801

- Input is most useful by December 15, 2015.
After we hear from you...

- We will incorporate your input into the evaluation process.
- There will be additional opportunities to participate in future steps of the process.
Let’s take a look at the form...

**Area Name:**

**Criterion 1: Apparent Naturalness:** The degree to which an area generally appears to be affected primarily by the forces of nature, with the imprints of man’s work substantially unnoticeable.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Considerations</th>
<th>Narrative</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1a) Within the area, do ecological conditions appear natural or to be noticeably modified by human intervention? Describe the natural appearance of the area. Consider the composition of plant and animal communities, water, and soil.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1b) Describe deviations from the natural condition and the extent to which they occur, including evidence of past management activities.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Are vegetation management, timber harvest, or restoration treatments substantially noticeable? Describe the type and extent of vegetation management activities and associated</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Criterion 1- Apparent Naturalness:
The degree to which an area generally appears to be affected primarily by the forces of nature, with the imprints of man’s work substantially unnoticeable.
Evaluation Form

Criterion 2- Outstanding opportunities for solitude OR for a primitive and unconfined type of recreation.
Criterion 3 - Stand-alone area of less than 5,000 acres that is not adjacent to existing wilderness or administratively recommended wilderness:

Evaluate how an area less than 5,000 acres is of sufficient size to make its preservation and use in an unimpaired condition practicable.
Criterion 4 - Unique and outstanding qualities:

The degree to which the area may contain ecological, geological, or other features of scientific, educational, scenic, or historical value.
Criterion 5 - Management:
The degree to which the area may be managed to preserve its wilderness characteristics, considering shape, configuration, legally established rights or uses, presence and amount of non-federal land, and management of adjacent lands.