



Nantahala and Pisgah National Forests



Evaluation Criteria and Comment Form for Areas That May Be Suitable for Inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System

The Nantahala and Pisgah National Forests are in the process of revising the forest plan. A required part of the revision process includes identifying and evaluating lands that may be suitable for inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System 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 (NWPS).

To complete the second step, the Nantahala and Pisgah National Forest Plan revision team developed the following questions to gather information related to each of the five criteria for wilderness characteristics listed in FSH 1909.12, Chapter 70 - Wilderness. Responses to these questions from planning team members, other national forest staff, and interested members of the public will be used to evaluate areas that may be suitable for inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System. This information will be used to determine which areas, or portions thereof, will be included in the forest plan alternatives considered in the NEPA Environmental Impact Statement.

Please use this form to comment on areas identified on the attached list. Use one form per area and note the area name in the space provided. If your comment is not addressed in the “considerations” column of each criterion, please include additional information in the “other” narrative section. If additional space is needed, provide your comments on separate sheets of paper and reference area name, evaluation criterion, and question number being addressed. Completed forms may be submitted by email to NCplanrevision@fs.fed.us with the subject line: “Wilderness evaluation input”, or by mail at the following address:

Attn: Plan Revision Team Leader,
National Forests in North Carolina
160 Zillicoa St., Suite A
Asheville, NC 28801

October 2015 Note: This hypothetical sample was prepared to help demonstrate how areas can be evaluated for inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System using criteria included in the Wilderness Act of 1964. This sample includes generic references to historical uses, ecological conditions, and recreation opportunities. Public input provided in response to evaluation questions for each inventory area will be compiled and considered.

Area Name: Hypothetical Sample Evaluation

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.

Considerations	Narrative
<p>1a) Within the area, do ecological conditions appear natural or to be noticeably modified by human intervention?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Describe the natural appearance of the area. Consider the composition of plant and animal communities, water, and soil. 	<p>This area is a place of distinctive natural beauty, with northern hardwood forests along ridge-tops, interspersed with heath balds and scattered rocky summits. Within the mid-elevation drainages are acidic cove and montane oak hickory forest down to the lowermost slopes. All of these forests types have scattered large trees and high structural diversity, and some have old-growth characteristics. Plant composition within the communities is very diverse.</p> <p>The area is scattered with numerous seeps and springs, which collect into steep and rugged stream channels strewn with large boulders, cascades, and waterfalls. Unique plant communities support numerous rare species of flora and fauna. The area contains approximately 28 miles of coldwater streams, of which 7 miles are occupied by brook trout.</p> <p>With a history of logging and impacts from non-native pest species, forest structure and composition has changed. Like other areas in the southern Appalachians recovering from past land uses, the area today is predominantly natural-appearing.</p>

<p>1b) Describe deviations from the natural condition and the extent to which they occur, including evidence of past management activities.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are vegetation management, timber harvest, or restoration treatments substantially noticeable? Describe the type and extent of vegetation management activities and associated landscape modifications; including existence of recent even-aged harvests, plantation style forest, low maintenance-level roads, skid roads, logging decks, cable yarder landings, fire lines, etc. • Are there maintained wildlife fields or linear wildlife openings, straightened or modified stream channels, modifications from past agricultural practices, etc. • Are there concentrations of invasive plants and/or animals within the area which appear substantially unnatural? Describe species, locations, and extent of occurrences. 	<p>Remnants of railroad grades are visible from logging activities in the early 1900's, segments of which are used as trails today.</p> <p>Since the mid-1980's much of the area has been managed as backcountry, and most of it was identified as an Inventoried Roadless Area in 2001. The area contains no vegetation management treatments less than 20 years old, and no maintained wildlife fields. Approximately 1.2 miles of maintenance level 1 road enters the area from the west.</p> <p>Occurrences of NNIS plants, such as coltsfoot and garlic mustard are scattered throughout the area. The most notable invasive pest affecting natural conditions is an insect called the hemlock wooly adelgid; which has killed many hemlock trees in this area.</p>
<p>1c) Describe the presence and extent of improvements in the area, including the type of improvement, approximate size of affected area, and whether structures may be considered historic (>50 years old).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does the area contain constructed improvements such as airstrips, heliports/landing zones, vertical structures (towers), utility corridors, buildings, dams, water tanks, penstocks, remnants of past occupation, etc.? • Are there recreation improvements within the area that are substantially noticeable modifications to the landscape; such as highly developed trails, day-use or overnight developed recreation sites, recreation structures, access roads, etc.? 	<p>The southern end of the area has a history of mineral and mica mining; with at least eight documented mine locations. There are approximately 4 miles of old roadbed which were used for mining exploration; none of which are NFS roads. There are approximately 2 miles of old logging railroad grades within the area. No buildings, bridges, or other structures exist within the boundaries.</p> <p>The area does have 14 miles of NFS Trails managed as Trail Class 2 for hiking, and 3 miles of TC3 horse trail. Trails of these classes are minimally developed, with native surface tread and few structures. There are no developed recreation sites within the evaluation area.</p>

1d) Other (Include any additional information related to criterion 1)

N/A

Criterion 2- Outstanding opportunities for solitude or a primitive and unconfined type of recreation: the degree to which the area has outstanding opportunities for solitude or for a primitive and unconfined type of recreation.

Considerations	Narrative
<p>2a) Describe the opportunities for, or impacts to, solitude within the area.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Are pervasive sights and sounds of civilization evident? Describe type, extent, and duration of sights and/or sounds, and the general location from which they are experienced. Consider topography, presence of screening, distance from impacts, and degree of permanent intrusions.• Are there developments or recurring activities immediately adjacent to the area that impact opportunities for solitude? Describe the type of development and proximity to area. Consider recreation developments and high use areas, private lands and associated infrastructure, roads/highways, airport flight paths, etc. Also consider effects from cherry-stemmed or buffered roads within the area.	<p>With its remote and rugged character, this area offers many opportunities for solitude .Sights and sounds of civilization are evident from certain locations. The core area is traversed by a ridge-top, while area boundaries are generally at mid-slope. This topography allows many views of the surrounding valleys and mountains.</p> <p>From the ridge top looking west, roads, communities, agricultural lands, and a resort are visible in the valley about 5 miles away. Private lands to the east are generally forested, with some agricultural, residential, and commercial development visible about 6 miles away. To the north, are mixed agricultural and residential lands with segments of a State highway visible from the ridge about 4 miles away. To the south are National Forest lands managed for timber production.</p> <p>At times and from certain locations, sounds from vehicles along the State highway can be heard, or from machinery or equipment on private lands in the valleys below. Occasionally, sounds from chainsaws, trucks, and other equipment may be heard from National Forest lands to the south. These sights and sounds of civilization would be not be considered pervasive across the entire area.</p>

<p>2b) Describe the opportunities for primitive and unconfined recreation.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are there opportunities to engage in primitive and unconfined recreation activities that connect visitors to nature; such as hiking, backpacking, horseback riding, floating, kayaking, camping, rock climbing, hunting, fishing, observing wildlife, or enjoying nature? Describe type of activity and extent of availability throughout area. • If other recreation activities occur within the area which would not be considered primitive and unconfined, describe those uses; such as mountain bike trails, concentrated use/large group gatherings, wagon trains, motorized-use trails, etc. 	<p>With limited road access and the absence of developed recreation sites, the primary recreation uses in the area are hiking, horseback riding, rock climbing, viewing scenery, hunting, fishing, and enjoying nature. Area trails are very popular with backpackers seeking a remote and challenging experience, and with horseback riders wanting primitive single-track trails.</p> <p>Fishing for trout occurs throughout the area, and supports the opportunity for quality back-country angling. This area has a history of bear hunting, as well as that for deer, turkey, grouse, and other game species.</p> <p>There are no highly developed trails (TC4 or 5), mountain bike trails, or motorized trails in the area being evaluated. Illegal ATV use has been reported on the west side.</p>
<p>2c) Other (Include any additional information related to criterion 2)</p>	<p>N/A</p>

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.

Considerations	Narrative
<p>3a) If the area is less than 5000 acres in size and not adjacent to existing designated or administratively recommended wilderness, is it of sufficient size to be preserved and used in an unimpaired condition?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider if the area is self-contained or topographically isolated. • Can the area be managed to preserve its wilderness characteristics? 	<p>N/A</p>
<p>3b) Other (Include any additional information related to criterion 3)</p>	<p>N/A</p>

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.

Considerations	Narrative
<p>4a) Does the area contain rare plant or animal communities, or ecosystems?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consider the extent and general location of rare communities or ecosystems. 	<p>Yes. The area is one of the last strongholds for several rare species of flora and fauna, including two federally-endangered animals, and two species of conservation concern (list species).</p> <p>Nine rare non-vascular plant species occur within this habitat including four southern Appalachian endemics, and another seventeen rare vascular species are present within the unique plant communities (list species). All of these species persist in high quality undisturbed habitats that could be maintained without active management.</p>
<p>4b) Does the area contain outstanding scenery or landscape features such as waterfalls, rivers, mountains, viewpoints, or geologic features?</p>	<p>Yes. Given its elevation, rocky summits, and rare ecosystems, the area is very scenic and unique among the southern Appalachian Mountains, and is a regional attraction for sightseeing.</p>
<p>4c) Is there a presence of structures, dwellings, sites or other remnants of past occupation that are considered part of the pre-historic, historic, or cultural landscape of the area? Note: Confidentiality requirements with respect to cultural resource sites must be respected (25 U.S.C 3056).</p>	<p>Yes. There are old roadbeds, railroad grades, and mine shafts from the mining and logging history of the early 1900's. (See narrative to question 1c.)</p>
<p>4d) Does the area contain sites of scientific or educational value, such as research natural areas or ongoing research?</p>	<p>Yes. Because of the unique ecosystems present, parts of the area have been set aside for the purposes of maintaining biological diversity, fostering education, and conducting non-manipulative research and monitoring.</p>
<p>4e) Does the area contain high quality water resources or important watershed features? Consider municipal water sources, brook trout habitat, and/or eligible or designated Wild and Scenic River segments.</p>	<p>Yes. All streams within the area are classified as Outstanding Resource Waters (ORW) by the NCDWQ, and as Designated Public Mountain Trout Waters (DPMTW) by the North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission (Also see narrative 1a). The area contains 2 miles of stream currently being evaluated for W&SR eligibility.</p>
<p>4f) Other (Include any additional information related to criterion 4)</p>	<p>N/A</p>

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.

Considerations	Narrative
5a) Describe the size, shape, configuration, and boundaries of the area and its ability to be managed to preserve wilderness characteristics. Consider narrow land areas, cherry-stemmed roads, inholdings, topography, etc. Address whether or not boundary changes could enhance preservation of wilderness characteristics.	The area is roughly 4 miles wide at its widest point, and approximately 9 miles long. It's primarily a ridge-top with boundaries at mid-slope on each side. Although the ridge-top topography exposes visitors to sights and sound of civilization, it offers opportunities for solitude in many areas. There are several narrow fingers of ownership on the south side which may not offer as many opportunities for solitude as the core area.
5b) Describe any legally established rights or uses within the area, including Tribal uses, reserved or outstanding mineral rights, easements, or rights of way? Describe the type, location and extent of these rights or uses.	The entire mountain range is of interest to the Cherokee Tribe. Tribal traditions and use are associated with the area. There are no known reserved or outstanding mineral rights in this area.
5c) Describe any State or Federal laws that may affect availability of the area for wilderness, or the ability to manage the area to preserve wilderness characteristics?	None are known.
5d) Describe the location, size, and extent of any inholdings of non-Federal lands within the area.	There are no inholdings of non-Federal land.
5e) Describe the ownership, management, and/or use of adjacent lands.	To the south are National Forest lands managed for timber, wildlife, and developed recreation. To the east are forested private lands adjacent to the area and agricultural lands in the distance. To the north are mixed agricultural/residential uses, and a State highway. Along the western boundaries are other NF lands managed for timber production immediately adjacent to the area, with agricultural/residential and a resort beyond.
5f) Other (Include any additional information related to criterion 5)	N/A