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Nantahala and Pisgah Forest Plan Development

DRAFT in progress

Descriptions of Management Areas 1 through 3

MA 1

MA 1 contains portions of many ecozones that provide the best opportunities for restoring a diversity of forest age classes and forest conditions. High quality wildlife habitat is provided for the broad range of species that benefit from grassy openings, young forest, and edges juxtaposed with mature and older forest. Public access is provided through a combination of roads open to motor vehicles, roads closed to motorized use but open for other types of use, trails, and cross-country access by foot travel.

Emphasis is on maintenance, enhancement and restoration of native forest communities to provide a mix of habitats for plants and animals associated with spatially heterogeneous forest habitats. Management activities are designed to: 1) retain forest cover across the management area; 2) increase spatial heterogeneity by increasing both early successional habitat and open conditions in older forests; 3) increase vertical vegetative diversity (canopy, sub-canopy, shrub, herbaceous layers all present and fairly well developed); 4) maintain or enhance hard and soft mast production; and 5) provide both non-motorized and motorized access at a sustainable level.

These areas provide suitable habitat for a variety of plant and animal populations associated with early successional forest habitats. Management activities are designed to sustain a distribution of early successional habitat conditions interspersed throughout a forested landscape.

The landscape character of this area retains a natural, forested appearance. A mosaic of early successional habitat patches of various sizes is interspersed throughout a predominately forested landscape. The area also contains forest communities greater than 100 years of age and permanent herbaceous openings providing both wildlife habitat diversity and visual diversity. Both timber regeneration and prescribed fire play an important role in the maintenance of forested communities throughout this management area.

V1.0 Desired Conditions

- A diverse and resilient forest that contains a range of vegetation age classes and structural components. Openings, edges, young forest, and open canopy conditions are more prevalent than in other management areas. Habitats occur in both open and closed canopy

conditions across young, older, and mature forests. Old growth components can be found in closed canopy portions of the management area.

- The desired ROS emphasis is Rooded Natural (RN), with a “Natural Appearing” landscape character theme. The emphasis for scenery is likely Moderate to Low, with high-quality scenery along the foregrounds of highly valued and travelled open system roads and trails.
- Sustainable timber production occurs on suitable lands, to provide forest products to local and regional communities. Management activities are spatially and temporally distributed to maximize the benefit to multiple objectives including wildlife habitat and diverse successional class development while minimizing adverse impacts to wildlife, soil, water, recreation and scenery resources.

MA 2

MA 2 provides opportunities for restoring a diversity of forest age classes and forest conditions, but with less emphasis on young forest and spatial heterogeneity. High-quality wildlife habitat is provided for species that benefit from predominantly mature and older forests in both open and closed-canopy conditions; with lesser amounts of young forest, edges, and grassy openings than in MA1. Open roads provide motorized access to the forest, but to a lesser extent than MA 1. Access is also provided by foot and possibly other means on roads closed to motorized use, on trails, and cross-country by foot. New road construction is limited to low service levels.

These areas provide suitable habitat for a variety of plant and animal populations with less dependence on early successional forest. Emphasis is on maintenance, enhancement and restoration of native forest communities to provide a mix of habitats for plants and animals associated with spatially heterogeneous forest habitats. Management activities are designed to: 1) retain forest cover across the management area; 2) maintain and improve habitat connectivity while providing some spatial heterogeneity from early successional habitat and both open and closed canopy conditions in mature and older forests; 3) maintain vertical vegetative diversity (canopy, sub-canopy, shrub, herbaceous layers all present and fairly well developed); 4) maintain or enhance hard and soft mast production; and 5) provide access through a sustainable system of roads and trails, with more emphasis on non-motorized access.

A mix of forest successional stages characterizes these areas, but the focus is on mid- to late-successional forests. Prescribed fire plays an important role in the maintenance of many of the forested communities found throughout this management area, with timber regeneration playing a lesser role than in MA1.

V1.0 Desired Conditions

- A mosaic of vegetation age classes and structural components provides habitat connectivity between adjacent portions of the landscape. Prescribed fire plays an important role in maintaining forest conditions. Sustainable timber production occurs on suitable lands within some portions of the management area.

- Mid- to late-successional forests predominate, with some areas of older, closed canopy forest supporting old growth characteristics. Openings, edges, young forest stands, and open canopy conditions are less distinctive and smaller than in Management Area 1.
- The network of roads open for public motorized use is limited compared to Management Area 1.
- The Remote Roded Natural (RN 2) ROS setting is emphasized, but a range from Semi-Primitive Motorized (SPM), SPNM, and RN are also present.
- A “Natural Appearing” landscape character theme includes historic/cultural/agricultural elements for restoration. The emphasis for scenery ranges from High to Low, with a high-quality scenery emphasis along the foregrounds of some highly travelled open system roads and trails.

MA 3 Backcountry

These areas are often remote and unroaded, allowing for large blocks of relatively undisturbed forested conditions. This management area includes all the inventoried roadless areas **that are not within** wilderness, wilderness study areas, or areas recommended for wilderness.

These areas are primarily shaped by natural processes (floods, storms, insects, diseases, and fires). Forests feature predominantly mid- to late-successional forest communities with a continuous forested canopy.

Prescribed fire is used to maintain or restore rare habitats and fire-associated forested communities, to improve forest structure, and to reduce fuel buildups. Lightning caused wildland fires are used when possible.

These areas provide large tracts of backcountry recreation opportunities with a semi-primitive emphasis. Hiking, backpacking, mountain bike riding, horseback riding, rock climbing, nature study, hunting, and fishing are typical activities that may be available in a setting where freedom from the sights and sounds of modern civilization is important. Visitors see little evidence of humans or human activities other than backcountry recreation use, maintenance of wildlife openings, and occasional prescribed burning. Outdoor skills and self-reliance are important for visitors because of the remoteness of these areas.

Existing roads are maintained but no road construction or reconstruction is in evidence. Tree cutting is limited to generally occasional small diameter trees removed for maintaining, restoring, or enhancing other resource values or public health and safety.

V1.0 Desired Conditions

- Large blocks of remote and unroaded forest appear to be primarily shaped by natural processes. Mid- to late-successional forest communities predominate, providing a contiguous forest canopy.
- Prescribed fire, wildlife improvements and other treatments are allowed that do not require new road construction or other than infrequent removal of generally small diameter trees (per the roadless rule).
- Non-motorized recreation provides opportunities for solitude, risk, and challenge in remote areas. The predominant means of access is over non-motorized trails, although public motorized use is allowed on a few open roads.
- Facilities are generally limited to trailheads and provide for visitor health and safety or resource protection rather than user comfort or convenience.
- The desired ROS emphasis ranges from SPNM and SPM to RN 2 with a “Natural Appearing/Natural Evolving” landscape character theme.
- The emphasis for scenery in this Management Area is likely High, especially along the foregrounds of open system roads and highly traveled trails.