

This developing plan content is under construction and is being shared as a snapshot of thinking. Additional changes based on Forest Service and public input are expected.

Recreation: Settings

Background

This section still under development.

Desired Conditions

- Forest settings reflect healthy and resilient landscapes, provide a diverse sense of place for community residents and visitors, and enhance high quality sustainable recreation opportunities.
- A full range of recreation settings are available, ranging from primitive, unroaded and challenging “backcountry” areas to roaded “frontcountry” settings which are easily travelled and convenient for connecting communities to the forest.
 - Front-country areas provide initial contact points for forest users and developed recreation settings where people can engage in a variety of recreation activities including scenic driving, hiking, camping, picnicking, fishing, and boating.
 - Back-country areas are mostly undeveloped places where people engage in a variety of more primitive recreation activities. Visitors rely on their outdoor skills and provide their own equipment as they engage in recreation activities.
 - Main access corridors to NFS lands and contact points such as developed trailheads and observation points have information available and provide a transition and orientation place for forest users as they enter back-country areas. Visitor use in these areas is moderate and disperses from these points.
- The landscape is generally natural appearing and often includes pastoral and historic/cultural features.
- Forest settings provide a variety of Landscape Character Themes, predominantly Natural Appearing, Natural Evolving and variations including Pastoral/Agricultural; Historic/Cultural; and Rural/Forested.
- Recreation settings retain their natural character as development and populations in the region continue to grow and new forms of recreation emerge.
- Resources, skills, energy, and enthusiasm of partners and communities are engaged to maintain or enhance recreation settings on the forest.

Standards

- Design and construction of new projects must follow the assigned Recreation Opportunity Spectrum classification for the specific management or geographic area location.

Management Approaches.

This section is still under development. Will include something about the Recreation Opportunity Spectrum and area mapping/emphasis.

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Recreation: Opportunities

Background

This section still under development. Nantahala and Pisgah National Forests provide outdoor experiences that showcase natural and cultural heritage of western North Carolina's mountains. Sustainable recreation opportunities showcase the forests' niches: sightseeing; water-based recreation (including motorized and non-motorized boating, swimming and other waterplay activities); non-motorized trails for hiking, mountain biking and pack-and-saddle; motorized trails; remote backcountry experiences; hunting fishing, and wildlife viewing; and conservation education.

Visitors need a basic familiarity of the outdoors and risks inherent to forested environments. Special skills may be required when engaging in activities that require specialized equipment or backcountry knowledge, including boating, horseback riding, mountain biking, rock climbing, off-highway vehicle (OHV) riding, long distance hiking or wilderness navigation.

Desired Conditions

- Visitors to the national forest connect to nature and cultural heritage through a variety of high quality, resource-based opportunities that:
 - feature the unique attributes of the forest's special places,
 - protect ecological and social integrity and stability of the natural, cultural and scenic environment,
 - expand visitors' understanding of public lands,
 - enable connections to inspire a stewardship ethic,
 - provide opportunities where visitors and local populations can achieve healthy lifestyles,
 - are accessible to persons with disabilities and inclusive of a culturally diverse population..
- Sustainable year-round recreation opportunities provide the opportunity to enhance the quality of life for residents, provide tourist destinations for visitors, and contribute to the vitality of local communities.
- The Forests are recognized for high quality wildlife-based recreational opportunities, including hunting, fishing and wildlife viewing.
 - Blinds, stands, cameras, and other structures brought in by the public are temporary and portable, and do not have long-term effects on vegetation and wildlife.
 - Wild and stocked recreational fishing continue as popular recreational activities in waters where those opportunities are not in conflict with the recovery of native species.
 - Wildlife viewing takes place in natural areas without disturbance to wildlife.
- A sustainable road and trail network provides access to hunting, fishing and other recreation activities.

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- Access to water is available for water-oriented activities, including fishing, motorized and non-motorized boating and other water sports. Access points are located in areas that provide safe, reliable access for users and do not degrade the aquatic resources.
 - Recreation use occurs within the ability of the site to support it, with high visitor satisfaction, minimal conflict between users, and without impacts to ecologically sensitive areas.
 - Risk is appropriately managed at recreation sites, based on development scale and resources.
 - Accurate high quality visitor information is available through multiple sources, including electronic media and on-site information boards, to enhance visitor safety and experiences.

Standards

- Recreational metal detecting is allowed only in designated metal detecting areas.
- Geocaching is allowed in most general forest areas, with prior approval for placing a cache from the local district office. Geocaches cannot be placed within Wilderness areas; Experimental Forests, Wild and Scenic River corridors; or where they may damage sensitive resources, such as historical or archeological sites.
- Non-commercial mineral collection, such as rockhounding, gem collection and and gold panning may take place on national forest lands where the activity is not restricted by mineral lease or in an area designated as closed for this activity. The following restrictions apply:
- Non-commercial mineral collection, such as rockhounding and gem collection is only allowed where minerals are loose and free on the surface. Tools that penetrate the surface shall not be permitted, except in designated sites after the effects of these activities have been analyzed.
- Gold planning may be used in the bed of streams, provided that no digging tools beyond pans are used.
- *Feb 2016 Note: The FS has had requests from the public to consider emphasizing non-commercial mineral collection in recognized areas on the forest. We are open to considering this idea, but have not arrived at that part of the planning process at this time, and may need subsequent site-specific NEPA to fully analyze this.*
- Any disturbance to or removal of historical or archaeological artifacts is prohibited by federal law.
- Fossil collection shall be in accord with Forest Service Paleontological Resources regulations (36 CFR 291).
- Authorization is required for non-commercial mineral collection for scientific, research, education or other purposes.

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Guidelines

- Use Leave No Trace techniques to reduce human impacts caused from dispersed camping.

Management Approaches:

- Consider new recreation sites and significant improvements to existing sites when they can be sufficiently maintained and managed for long-term through a combination of agency and partner support, and where they support a niche opportunity of the forest.
- Emphasize improving, modifying and maintaining existing sites, rather than building new ones.
- Work collaboratively to guide development of program priorities, emphasis areas and place-based recreation settings.
- Through place-based collaboration, encourage shared understanding of how to best focus on the distinctive recreation opportunities provided in the N&P NFs.
- A mosaic of funding sources (including grants, volunteers, permittees, partners, and concessionaires) is used to provide recreation opportunities and enhancements.
- The Forest coordinates with NC Wildlife Resources Commission to manage habitat associated with hunting, fishing and wildlife viewing.

See also: Trails, Aquatic Resources, Ecozones

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Concentrated Use Areas

Background:

Concentrated Use Areas include both developed recreation sites and areas of high density dispersed recreation activity. This includes all areas where users gather or frequent; trailheads, dispersed campsites, developed rec sites, etc.

The ROS emphasis is on Roaded Natural (RN1). Rural ROS settings are generally limited to sites with Development Scales of 4 – 5. Reference section X.

Motorized access and support facilities (i.e., roads, parking lots, water access) are emphasized although non-motorized experiences are also often present.

Desired Conditions

- Concentrated Use Areas are visually appealing, environmentally healthy, and well maintained in developed or dispersed settings.
- Priority developed sites meet all national quality standards.
- At highly developed sites, well-maintained forest roads and well-marked trails provide relatively easy access for users, such as urban visitors and recreationists with special access needs.
- In dispersed campsites, visitors expect limited rustic amenities, fewer signs, and minimal development.
- Fisheries and wildlife habitat improvements and viewing opportunities compliment developed sites.
- Recreation resources and activities are compatible with other resource management activities.

Standards:

- Discharging firearms is not allowed within 150 yards of developed recreation sites.
- Stabilize and restore areas to sustainable levels of use and condition when use is negatively affecting natural and/or cultural resources, public safety, or recreation experiences.
- New recreation facilities and sites, as well as revisions and rehabilitations to existing sites, shall meet Forest design review and approval standards.
- Developed and day use sites identified as prone to flash flooding shall be appropriately signed.

Guidelines:

- Maintain trails in highly developed recreation areas to complementary maintenance levels (generally ML 3-5).

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- When needed to protect soil and water resources, use steps, trail surfacing, fencing or other techniques to control patterns of use.

Management Approaches

- Recreation sites support the desired recreation experiences and settings identified through collaborative place-based recreation planning.
- Based on Forest priorities identified with public input, the portfolio of available developed sites is gradually transitioned to a level and distribution that is predicted to be financially sustainable. Facility maintenance decisions are prioritized to emphasize investments in sites that will be sustainable.
- To help achieve financial sustainability, an emphasis should be placed on reducing the deferred maintenance backlog, and/or modifying existing facilities and/or services. (Note: If needed, this could include reduced services; reduced development scale; reduced seasons of operations; decommissioning)
- Bear-proof trash or food storage containers are available at sites where bears are known to frequent, when funding is available.
- In developed recreation sites (campgrounds or road-side campsites), camping with horses and pack stock is restricted to designated and signed equestrian camping areas.
- Use native plant species when developing vegetation management plans or landscaping in developed recreation sites whenever possible.
- Cooperative agreements for law enforcement, and search, rescue and recovery operations are developed and kept current through periodic review.
- Development scale, amount of use and national quality standards determine appropriate levels for patrolling, cleaning, and providing public contact.
- Vegetation management and other activities maintain the natural characteristics and are designed to:
 - Enhance a diversity of both game and non-game wildlife habitats where wildlife viewing opportunities are desired.
 - Feature flowering trees, hard and soft mast bearing trees, fall color species, character trees and shrub species
 - Create a pleasing mosaic of tree species of various densities and stem sizes
 - Minimize impacts from insect or disease outbreaks
 - Rehabilitate areas damaged by insects or disease or overuse.

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Recreation: Trails

Background

Not yet drafted.

Desired Conditions

- An ecologically, socially, and financially sustainable system of trails provides high quality recreation experiences across a range of settings for each use-type.
- Sustainable trail use occurs within the ability of the land to support it, with high visitor satisfaction, minimal conflict between users, and without impacts to ecologically sensitive areas.
- Unsustainable trails are transitioned to a sustainable condition utilizing state-of-the-art trail design principals, or are decommissioned and rehabilitated.
- User-created trails are identified and rehabilitated or properly designed and incorporated into designated trail system through a collaborative planning process.
- Connector trails enhance loop opportunities within the existing network, and where appropriate, trails provide connections to communities or other public lands.
- Mountain bike, equestrian, and OHV trail use occurs only on designated routes.
- Partner groups and communities are involved with and supportive of sustainable trail management efforts.
- Trailheads are appropriately designed for their intended use and well maintained.
- Current trail information is available in a variety of mediums and locations, is easily accessible, and promotes a responsible user ethic.
- Nationally designated trails maintain the characteristics and conditions for which they were established.

Standards

- If unacceptable damage to natural or cultural resources is identified on a section of trail, mitigate or temporarily close that section of trail until proper planning and implementation can occur to correct the issue, re-route, or decommission the trail.
- Designated Trail Allowed Uses:
 - Hiking is allowed on all designated trails, roads, and for cross-country travel, unless area is administratively closed to public access.
 - Equestrian and bicycle use is allowed only on trails designated for those uses and on gated or open forest development roads of the appropriate Road Maintenance Objective (RMO), unless signed otherwise.

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- Motorized trail use shall occur only on trails designated for their use within managed seasons of operation, as defined in accordance with the forest travel management plan and identified on motorized vehicle use maps.
- New trails shall not traverse or approach unique rocky areas. Existing trails are relocated away from rocky areas known to support PET species, SCC, or other unique habitat characteristics.
- Existing trails shall not negatively affect PET species or SCC, including spruce-fir moss spider (*Microhexura montivaga*), Appalachian woodrat (*Neotoma magister*), spreading avens (*Geum radiatum*), Roan bluet (*Houstonia montana*), Blue Ridge goldenrod (*Solidago spithamea*), and rock gnome lichen (*Gymnoderma lineare*), associated with rocky areas, such as high and low elevation rocky summits, high and low elevation granitic domes, or basic and acidic cliffs.
- Only allow trails into or through Southern Appalachian bogs if the educational and/or scientific benefits justify the risk to soil compaction, non-native invasive plant infestations, and/or micro-hydrological changes.

Guideline

- Mixed use non-motorized trails are acceptable, but should be accompanied by educational efforts to reduce user conflicts. All user groups should be encouraged to share responsibility and work together in supporting the trail.
- Motorized trails should not have mixed use with equestrian or mountain bike users, and hiking is not encouraged.
- Trails design may vary in difficulty, but should generally be suitable for the average user.
- Along trails and roads with existing populations of PET and SCC plant species, such as Virginia Spiraea (*Spiraea virginiana*), glade spurge (*Euphorbia purpurea*), Smoky Mountain mannagrass (*Glyceria nubigena*), ash-leaved golden-banner (*Thermopsis fraxinifolia*), or Appalachian violet (*Viola walteri* var. *appalachiensis*) ground disturbance activities should be minimized that displace plants. Maintenance activities such as mowing and/or herbicide applications should be timed when the rare plants are dormant.

Management Approaches

- To achieve a financially sustainable trail system, new trail construction can be offset by a reduction in trail mileage of a similar use type.
- When considering expansion or improvements to existing designated trails, a financial analysis can inform the longterm sustainability of the proposed activity.
- Emphasis shall be placed on maintaining existing motorized trails to standard, rather than creating additional trail systems. Trail improvements, relocation, and /or short connectors

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within an existing trail system may be constructed to more effectively address resource concerns or improve alignment for sustainability.

- The following attributes are used as indicators of trails that are of higher priority to operate and maintain:
 - Day use hiking opportunities, particularly those associated with high visitation such as scenic overlooks and waterfalls.
 - Nationally recognized hiking trails, such as the Appalachian National Scenic Trail, National Recreation Trails and National Historic Trails.
 - The existing network of designated motorized trails to the extent they are sustainable using fees and grant funding (this does not include 4-wheel use of low maintenance roads).
 - Mountain bike, equestrian, and backcountry hiking trails as further prioritized by collaborative trail planning.