Geographic Areas Overview
Nantahala and Pisgah Forest Plan
November 2014, Working Draft

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

Places Matter. The forest plan will divide the forest into 12 Geographic Areas with goals identified for each area. By separating the forest into distinct landscapes, the Forest Plan will recognize the opportunities in each part of the forest, including restoration and sustainable recreation opportunities, connections to nearby communities, and opportunities for partnerships with the public, other organizations and governments.

How were these areas developed? These geographic areas were defined by landscape character and public use. First, boundaries were informed by landscape characteristics, including geologic features, topography, hydrology and water features as well as forest types and vegetation composition. Then the lines were further refined by consideration of cultural and historical elements, recreational opportunities and experiences and the consideration of local communities. While the boundaries of the Geographic Areas extend beyond the lands managed by the Forest Service, this is only to provide context for the forest within the broader western North Carolina landscape; the plan direction will only apply to the management of Forest Service lands.

What will the plan say about each geographic area? Within each Geographic Area, the Plan will describe the conditions of the forest as it relates to our themes – restoration and resiliency, providing clean and abundant water, and connecting people to the land. Then there will be a section on goals for each area. As we work toward developing additional geographic area content for the plan, we will include that information on this web page.

Whose input is being considered as these are being developed? The forest service is using a diverse team of specialists, including those with local on the ground knowledge to draft an initial writeup for each geographic area. In addition to FS professional knowledge, we are integrating information we have heard from thousands of public comments into our development of this chapter of the plan. These sections of the plan will be shared for public input, just like other initial plan building blocks have been.

A brief overview of each geographic area begins on the next page.
**Bald Mountains**

High-elevation grassy balds add a striking diversity to the landscape, allowing hikers and backpackers long range views of surrounding mountains and up close views of abundant wildflowers. In the valleys of these mountains, fast moving rivers and creeks define the landscape and provide unparalleled angling and whitewater experiences.

**Eastern Escarpment**

Shaped by the Blue Ridge escarpment, this craggy, steep, rugged landscape with projecting rocks and cliffs draws visitors seeking a challenging hike and rock climbers. Sudden elevation changes lead to lush, moist gorges and valleys carved by rivers and decorated with dramatic waterfalls and shortleaf pine habitat.

**Black Mountains**

Multiple peaks over 5,000 feet, including Mt. Mitchell create weather systems, which bring ample rain and wind that shape unique forest habitats such as Spruce Fir. Remote settings protect the waterfall spray zone habitats, biodiversity of the granitic domes, and the high elevation hiking experience for visitors.
**Pisgah Ledge**

The highly scenic Davidson River winds through mountains topped with bare, rolling rock faces making this area the most heavily visited on the Forest. Waterfalls and rockslides create unique experiences for casual visitors, while challenging mountain biking attracts others.

**Shining Rock**

Secluded landscapes and high-elevation mountains provide a backdrop long-distance hiking and high quality trout streams. Unique habitat mixes, such hardwood forests, support a variety of game animals, making hunting a popular pastime.

**Highland Domes**

Known as “the land of granite walls and waterfalls,” the rolling rock faces of the granitic domes and waterfalls are popular scenic viewing experiences. Rugged backcountry with dramatic elevation changes and wild rivers create unique opportunities, such as backcountry whitewater kayaking and rafting.
Great Balsam

High mountains provide the backdrop for broad valleys, which support highly productive hardwood forests. These productive forests support wildlife habitat and outstanding hunting opportunities.

Fontana Lake

Larger, wider valleys at lower elevation surrounded by high mountains are home to a higher concentration of shortleaf pine. Santeetlah and Fontana Lakes are a playground for motorized boaters while the mountains provide long-distance hiking opportunities.

Unicoi Mountains

Long-range views of layered mountains reward visitors with classic Smoky Mountain landscapes and beautiful fall colors of the hardwood forests. Remote settings create unique opportunities, such as hiking in old growth groves and backcountry fishing and hunting.
Nantahala Gorge

The internationally known Nantahala River carves a deep, rugged river gorge through tall mountains. The fast-moving and rocky river draws thousands of boaters and on-lookers each year.

Nantahala Mountains

Great rounded mountains spread out across the landscape rich in hardwood forests. Hunters, long-distance hikers horseback riders, and those seeking views enjoy remote settings.

Hiwassee

Big Rivers running through broad, flat valleys surrounded by steep mountain ranges and two large lakes provide distinct water-based recreation settings at lower elevations. Shortleaf pine colors the landscape and the visitor experience.