



File Code: 1950
Date: February 3, 2020

Dear Interested Parties:

I am pleased to announce the release of the Nantahala and Pisgah National Forests' proposed forest plan and accompanying draft environmental impact statement (DEIS) and am seeking your feedback. The proposed forest plan will provide strategic guidance for land and resource management on the Nantahala and Pisgah NFs for the next 15 years or more. The plan recognizes the multiple uses of National Forests, including recreation, timber, water, wilderness, and wildlife habitat. The draft documents and supporting geospatial information are available on the Forests' plan revision website at www.fs.usda.gov/goto/nfsnc/nprevision. Paper copies are available to review at all Nantahala and Pisgah NFs' offices.

This proposed forest plan was developed through collaboration with federal, state, and local agencies, Tribes, conservation organizations, local communities, and others interested in the future management of the Nantahala and Pisgah NFs. It establishes a strong commitment to connecting people to the land, sustaining healthy ecosystems, providing clean and abundant water, and partnering with others to achieve objectives. It creates a framework for future decision-making and outlines a broad, general program for achieving desired conditions and objectives.

Future decisions on projects to implement the forest plan will be made on a site-specific basis using appropriate analysis and documentation in compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA).

The DEIS discloses the environmental impacts associated with the proposed forest plan and all four alternatives, including the No Action alternatives, Proposed Action and two additional alternatives. A Notice of Availability of the draft documents will be published in the Federal Register on or shortly after February 14, 2020. The date of publication in the Federal Register marks the start of the official 90-day public comment period. Check the forest plan revision webpage for the exact date of publication.

We will be hosting public meetings at six to seven locations across the Forests during the 90-day comment period. Each public meeting will present an overview of the plan revision process and a summary of what is included in the proposed plan and DEIS. Forest Service staff will be available at the meetings to answer questions. Additionally, webinars that provide detailed explanations on specific topics will be posted on the plan revision webpage between early February and late March. Topics for these webinars include: 1) Fire; 2) Recreation and Access; 3) Species Analysis; 4) Timber Calculations; 5) Wilderness and Special Designations; and 6) Old Growth.

I invite and encourage you to review the proposed plan and DEIS and provide us with comments. Your comments, suggestions, and supporting rationale will be important to any changes or



refinements to the proposed plan and DEIS prior to the final decision, which is anticipated to be released in early 2021. Please make your comments as specific as possible to the contents of the draft documents. Comments should be within the scope of the proposal, specific to the proposal, have a direct relationship to the proposal, and must include supporting reasons for my consideration. Comments will be accepted for 90 calendar days following publication of the Notice of Availability in the Federal Register. It is the responsibility of the sender to ensure timely receipt of any comments submitted.

Comments, including attachments, may be submitted electronically using the online commenting tool, CARA: <https://cara.ecosystem-management.org/Public//CommentInput?Project=43545>. This comment tool will be available once the Notice of Availability has been published and official comment period begins (expected February 14, 2020). Written comments can be submitted via mail to Michelle Aldridge, ATTN: Plan Revision Team; National Forests in North Carolina, 160 Zillicoa Street, Ste A; Asheville, NC 28801.

It is important that reviewers provide their comments at such times and in such a way that they are useful to the Agency's preparation of the EIS. Therefore, comments should be provided prior to the close of the comment period and should clearly articulate the reviewer's concerns and contentions. The submission of timely and specific comments can affect a reviewer's ability to participate in subsequent administrative review or judicial review (36 CFR219.53(a)).

Comments received in response to this solicitation, including names and addresses of those who comment, will be part of the public record for this proposed action. Comments submitted anonymously will be accepted and considered; however, anonymous comments will not provide the respondent with standing to participate in subsequent administrative review or judicial review.

If you have specific questions regarding the draft proposals, environmental analysis, or how to comment please contact the National Forests in North Carolina at 828-257-4200.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'HAN', is written over a horizontal line.

HURSTON A. NICHOLAS
Forest Supervisor