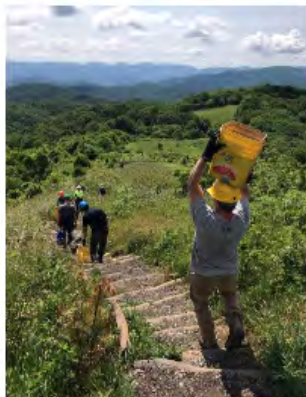


Nantahala and Pisgah Forest Plan Revision Reader's Guide



Greetings forest user,

The U.S. Forest Service has revised the land management plan for the Nantahala and Pisgah National Forests. The forest plan provides a strategic framework for the next 20 years. The plan includes desired conditions and goals for the future of the Forests and objectives that describe actions the Forest Service will take to move toward those goals.

The plan positions the Nantahala and Pisgah National Forests to address the challenges that we anticipate in the years ahead, such as the growth of wildland urban interface; the spread of insects, disease, and invasive species; development pressure on adjacent private lands; unprecedented increase in recreation; and the escalating impacts from climate change. In this time of accelerated change, ensuring our forest ecosystems are healthy and resilient is critical to long-term sustainability of the diverse habitats these forests provide for wildlife and plants, and for supplying the clean water and other ecosystem benefits that we all depend on.

In addition to the final plan, we are releasing an environmental analysis of the plan, called an Environmental Impact Statement. This Reader's Guide provides an overview of these documents with references for more information.

This plan was developed and shaped by extensive public input. We worked with diverse interests to build a broadly supported and implementable forest plan that will connect people to the land; restore forest resiliency, forest health, and wildlife habitat; provide clean and abundant water; support recreation and local jobs; and provide a platform for working together toward shared goals.

We encourage you to reach out to organizations who have been involved in the process and that represent your interests to see how your interests have been incorporated.

-The Nantahala and Pisgah Plan Revision Team
January 2022

Connecting People to the Land



From the very beginning, the forests of Western North Carolina have been recognized for their importance to people. The rich cultural mosaic of people who have called this region home look to the forest for spiritual renewal, traditional uses like hunting, fishing, and gathering, scenic beauty, year-round outdoor play and exercise, and economic opportunity. The revised plan:

- Establishes a framework for **sustainable recreation**, including standards for **new trail construction** built on modern design and collaboration.
- Calls for developing trail **loop opportunities**, a strategy for **climbing opportunities**, an operations and maintenance guide for dispersed **campsites**, and more.
- Supports **economic development** and **tourism** in local communities, the **forest product industry** and **nontimber forest product** collection, maintains the forests' **scenic integrity, access**, and sustains our **cultural and historic resources**.
- Honors and redeems our **trust responsibility to tribes**, recognizing tribes and tribal members as partners in managing the national forests, and valuing **traditional ecological knowledge** and places of tribal significance.



The revised plan emphasizes forest places and uses by identifying 12 geographic areas and a new management area that recognizes access and concentrated recreation use, including National Recreation Trails.

Sustaining Healthy Ecosystems



The forests contain incredible biodiversity, from hardwood forests to southern pines, coldwater streams, and habitat for plants and animals. The revised forest plan:

- Establishes a clear vision for each ecological community on the forest.
- Accelerates the development of young forest and open forest, which are currently underrepresented habitats, while also ensuring that development of old growth characteristics will be prioritized:
 - Doubles annual **young forest** creation practices (from 650 to 1,200 acres) and accomplishes even more with the help of partners (up to 3,200 acres annually).
 - Emphasizes using fire and mechanical harvest to restore **open forest** conditions in tiered objectives.
 - Increases the designated **old growth** network by more than 50,000 acres.
 - Increases **prescribed fire** up to 20,000 annual acres and up to 45,000 annual acres with additional resources.
- Restores and maintains **rare habitats**, including wetlands and Southern Appalachian bogs, Carolina hemlock bluffs, balds, spruce fir, and more.
- Provides overall **habitat diversity** of all wildlife, including habitats to support recovery of federally **threatened and endangered species**.
- Increases **nonnative invasive species treatments**, habitat restoration and **watershed projects**.



The revised plan recommends more than 49,000 acres of undeveloped land for **recommended wilderness**.

These areas have the highest degree of wilderness characteristics, and due to their remote and inaccessible character and adjacency to existing wilderness, there is a low probability of conflicts with other management goals and multiple uses.

Providing Clean and Abundant Water



Water is a life-sustaining resource for the Nantahala and Pisgah NFs and the natural and local communities that depend on it. Beyond ecological communities, forest waters also support municipal water supplies, tribal lands, agriculture, and industry. Increasing development pressures and impacts of climate change will make water from the forests even more vital in the next generation.

The revised forest plan:

- Identifies **priority watersheds** for watershed restoration activities during the next 20 years, spread across the forest.
- Emphasizes **aquatic organism passage, stream channel improvement** projects, maintaining and expanding the range of **brook trout, freshwater mussels and other aquatic species**.
- Establishes **streamside zones** where activities contribute to improving the larger stream ecosystem.
- Includes an objective to develop a forestwide **road maintenance** plan to promote public safety, prevent erosion, and protect water quality while maintaining access.
- Provides the flexibility to **adapt** to changing conditions in the face of **climate change**.



Partnering with Others



The future of public lands is larger than the work of the Forest Service. The plan values the contributions of State and local governments, non-governmental partners, and citizens in working together toward our shared goals. The planning process has involved an unprecedented amount of engagement from the public. Continued public involvement will be an integral part of plan implementation, monitoring, and adaptive management. We are committed to working with partners and the public as we implement the new plan.

The revised forest plan:

- Builds on **thousands of ideas** that citizens, organizations, and governments shared during plan development.
- Ensures that **all interests** benefit from the implementation of our **multiple use mission**.
- Identifies **stretch goals** for nearly all objectives if additional capacity in the form of resources or help from others is available during plan implementation; and **identifies ways to work with others** to accomplish shared goals.
- Positions the forest to become a **partner** of choice for **volunteers** and local communities as well as local and national organizations.



The revised plan ensures **all are welcome** to the national forest, positioning the forest to expand the diversity of **visitors, volunteers, and partners**, and increase public land **employment pathways** across all demographics.

What will the final plan enable?

The Plan will:

- ◇ **Recognize and contribute to multiple uses of the Forest Service mission** including timber harvest, recreation, wildlife, water and wilderness.
- ◇ **Improve forest health and resiliency**, increase the pace and scale of restoration above current levels; maintain and improve the diversity of forest vegetation especially young forest, open forest, and oldgrowth conditions; increase management activity using silviculture and fire as tools; and control invasive species.
- ◇ **Improve or maintain wildlife habitat conditions** for the wildlife species that depend on the forest, including federally listed species and species of conservation concern, rare and unique habitats, resident and migrant game species, pollinators, birds, bats, fish, and more.
- ◇ **Contribute to clean and abundant water** by sustaining surface water and groundwater flows, protect water quality, maintain fish and wildlife habitat, control erosion, restore streams and streamside zones, and continue to sustain forests as a source of drinking water to communities in Western NC.
- ◇ **Improve the Forests' world class recreation opportunities** for year-round outdoor play and exercise. The plan will provide for both developed and dispersed recreation on land and water, from an outdoor multiple use trail system to indoor facilities, ensuring opportunities and sites are sustainable.
- ◇ **Enable forest access**, including for hunting, fishing and gathering of forest products, as well as providing for the needs of Federally recognized Tribes.
- ◇ **Contribute to local economies** by collaboratively providing resources, improvements to infrastructure, sustainable levels of renewable forest commodities that contribute to local businesses, tourism, and sustainable community growth.
- ◇ **Sustain the Forests' scenic beauty and cultural resources**, enabling the forest to remain a destination for spiritual renewal and connecting to our shared history.
- ◇ **Continue to manage existing administrative and Congressionally designated areas which will not be changed during revision.** These areas include:
 - National Scenic & Historic Trails, such as the Appalachian Trail and the Trail of Tears*
 - Congressionally designated Wilderness*
 - Wild & Scenic Rivers*
 - Inventoried Roadless Areas*
 - Roan Mountain*
 - Wilderness Study Areas*
 - Experimental Forests Research*
 - Natural Areas Cradle of Forestry Historic Site*
- ◇ **Identify land allocations in the following three areas:**
 - Recommended Wilderness*
 - Eligible Wild and Scenic Rivers*
 - Special Interest Areas*
- ◇ **Recognize the value of partners in shaping our shared future**, identify how other agencies, government and non-government partners, volunteers and visitors contribute to sustaining these National Forests; and identify and help facilitate additional opportunities to work together for shared goals.
- ◇ **Be inclusive of input from the public, governments, Federally Recognized Tribes, and best available science.** The plan is developed with input from the public and future planning and projects will be undertaken in collaboration with the public. The Forest Service will continue to collaborate with the public on implementing the revised plan.

The Revised Plan will not: Decide the future of a particular trail, road, recreation site, or project design; make any leasing decisions about oil and gas resources; or authorize activities to take place on the forest. (All future projects must be analyzed prior to implementation.)

How is the revised plan different from the current plan?

The original plan is almost 35 years old, signed in 1987 and significantly amended in 1994. The plan has had several additional amendments since 1994.

The revised plan will be poised to accelerate the achievement of our shared goals because:

- It establishes a clear vision for each ecological community on the forest.
- It emphasizes forest places and uses that are important to people.
- It identifies an additional tier of work beyond current Forest Service capacity that may be accomplished with the help of partners.
- It builds on thousands of ideas that citizens, organizations, and governments shared during plan development.
- It ensures that all interests benefit from the implementation of our multiple use mission.

Below are some ways the revised plan shifts our management that will set the trajectory for years to come, serving as a model for forests that follow.

Ecosystem-based approach: Unlike the previous plan that framed activities in terms of outputs and traditional standards and guidelines, the revised plan developed desired conditions for each ecological community. By using ecological communities, projects will consider needs across a broader landscape, better enabling an increase in pace and scale of restoration.

Recognizes the importance of place: The revised plan places a much greater emphasis on the way people use the forest - the places and uses that are important to people. The plan is divided into 12 geographic areas that outline goals for connecting people to the land in different parts of the forest and discusses opportunities for working across boundaries with neighboring lands. This chapter reflects the interests we heard from thousands of public comments, as reflecting the interest of local residents and governments.

Collaborative capacity: The plan identifies objectives for the next 10 years at two tiers: one if existing FS capacity continues, and a second tier if we are able to garner additional capacity in the form of help from others. By outlining what we could do with the help of others we hope to incentivize shared stewardship and build partnerships to achieve more work on the ground.

Traditional ecological knowledge and tribal values: This land has been managed by the Forest Service for just over 100 years, while tribal connections in Western North Carolina extend to time immemorial. The Forest plan honors and redeems our trust responsibility to tribes, recognizing tribes and tribal members as partners in managing the national forest, and valuing traditional ecological knowledge and places of tribal significance.

Unprecedented public involvement: The planning process has involved an unprecedented amount of public engagement, which is intended to set the stage for future involvement in project design. The plan has a section on public involvement and a guideline to facilitate collaboration and meaningful public participation during preparation of integrated landscape projects, except in emergency situations.

Adaptive to 21st century challenges: The plan sets an adaptive framework to address 21st century challenges we see on the horizon: impacts of development pressure on adjacent private lands; unprecedented increase in recreation; the growth of wildland urban interface; the spread of insects, disease, and invasive species; and the impacts from climate change. The plan also enables adaptation to challenges we can't yet anticipate – creating a monitoring program that will allow us to regularly evaluate our actions, gauge our progress toward long-term goals, and modify our approach where needed.

What documents are now available?



The **forest plan** establishes a vision for how the Nantahala and Pisgah National Forests will be managed for the next 20 years, and establishes the strategic framework for achieving that vision. All future projects, everything from trail building to tree harvesting and stream restoration, will have to be consistent with the forest plan.

The plan includes: desired conditions that describe what we want forest resources to be like in the future and objectives, the measurable steps we will take in the next decade to achieve those long-term goals. The plan also includes a set of maps that show where plan direction will be applied across the forest.

The **final environmental impact statement (FEIS)** describes and analyzes in detail the effects of the plan on the physical, biological, and social resources of the Nantahala and Pisgah National Forests. It evaluates different alternatives analyzed for the revised plan, including one added between draft and final. The FEIS also includes numerous appendices documenting the details of the analysis process. They include:

- Appendix A. Response to Comments
- Appendix B. Description of the Analysis Process
- Appendix C. Ecological Sustainability Analysis
- Appendix D. Vegetation Modeling Methods
- Appendix E. Wilderness Evaluation Process
- Appendix F. Wild and Scenic River Evaluation Process
- Appendix G. Coordination with other Public Planning Efforts
- Appendix H. Public and Government Involvement
- Appendix I. Maps



The **draft record of decision (ROD)** explains the selected alternative for the final plan, and the rationale behind the final plan.



This Readers Guide provides information about the contents of these documents and their appendices and directs readers to sections that may be of interest. Look for this book icon for tips on which sections to read for more information.

What does the plan contain?



The plan provides the strategic direction for the Nantahala and Pisgah National Forests. Here's what you'll find inside:

Chapter 1: Introduction

This chapter briefly describes the Nantahala and Pisgah National Forests in the context of surrounding public and private lands in Western North Carolina and summarizes the current condition and trends (which can be found in more detail in the 2014 Assessment report).

Chapter 2: Forestwide Direction

This chapter contains the bulk of the plan direction, organized into resources topics.

Chapter 3: Geographic Area Direction

This chapter provides direction for the Forest's distinct landscapes, recognizing opportunities in each part of the Forest for restoration and sustainable recreation opportunities, connections to nearby communities, and opportunities for partnerships with the public, other organizations, and governments. Geographic areas contain the forestwide resources mentioned in Chapter 2.

Chapter 4: Management Areas

Management areas identify places across the forest that require similar management. They outline the methods and tools the Forest Service will use to maintain National Forest System land. Management areas were identified using the principles of landscape ecology while considering the benefits the Forests provide to people.

Chapter 5: Monitoring and Adaptive Management

This chapter outlines how we will monitor our progress toward our long-term goals and provides a framework to adapt our approach when needed.



Appendices provide in-depth information and are contained at the back of the plan.

Appendix A: Consolidated Forest Plan Objectives identifies all the plan objectives in one spot, organized by theme—a great one-stop resource to understand the proposed plan.

Appendix B: Timber Calculations contains information on the planned timber sale program timber harvest levels and methods of forest vegetation management practices expected during the plan.

Forestwide Plan Direction



The plan's Forestwide chapter (Chapter 2) contains plan guidance that applies to the entire Nantahala and Pisgah National Forests.



FORESTWIDE DIRECTION

Describes management for the entire forest

Made up of Desired Conditions, Objectives,
Standards and Guidelines, and Management
Approaches

Think of the Forest Plan as a road through the Forest...

DESIRED CONDITIONS describe your destination. These are the big-picture goals. You may not get there overnight, but you know where you want to go.

OBJECTIVES describe the road you are driving on. These are time specific, measurable, and are the actions you take to get to your destination.

STANDARDS and **GUIDELINES** describe the guardrails that keep you on the road. These are the rules that you must follow.

MANAGEMENT APPROACHES describe the toolbox you have to make sure you get to your destination in one piece. They are optional to use, but can help along the way.

The Plan contains desired conditions, objectives, standards, guidelines and management approaches on each resource topic identified below:

Public Involvement
Community Connections
Air
Climate Change
Geologic Resources
Watershed
Soils
Water
Aquatic Systems
Streamside Zones

Terrestrial Ecosystems
Forest Landscape and
Connectivity
Ecological Restoration Priorities
Ecosystem Management
Wildlife Habitat Across Ecozones
Plant and Animal Diversity
Old Growth Network
Forest Health
Timber Management Practices
Fire and Fuels

Lands and Special Uses
Transportation and Access
Facilities
Recreation Settings
Developed Recreation
Dispersed Recreation
Scenery
Cultural Resources
Tribal Resources
Non-timber Forest Products
Minerals and Energy
Conservation Education and
Interpretation

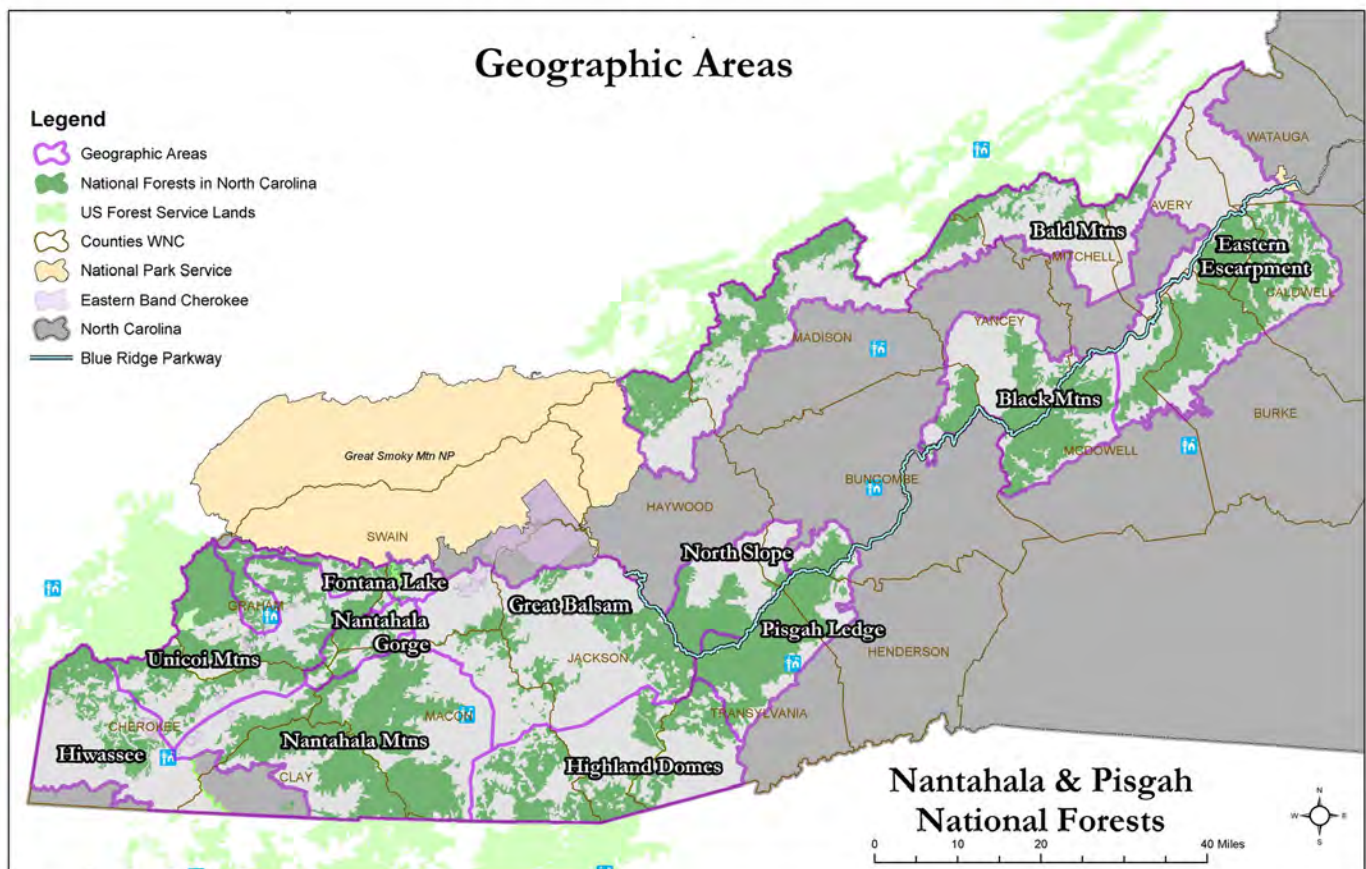
Geographic Area Direction



The Plan's Geographic Areas chapter (Chapter 3) recognizes Nantahala and Pisgah National Forests' unique sense of place across more than 1 million acres.

By separating the Forest into distinct landscapes, the proposed plan recognizes opportunities unique to 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 local governments. Geographic areas are impacted by communities and topographic elements that help define each area.

This chapter and concept was added to the plan in response to public input. Each geographic area has goals that will serve as emphases for management and were crafted with input from the public.



What are Management Areas?



The Plans' Management Areas chapter (Chapter 4) provides direction for areas that have similar management intent and strategy, including general forest zones, and congressionally or administratively designated areas.

While the majority of forest plan direction is contained in the Forestwide Chapter, some areas of the forest have specific management needs. These areas are known as **management areas**.

Forest management areas can be compared to city zones. However, instead of being zoned as residential, commercial, or industrial, the forests' management areas are divided into locations emphasizing different aspects of the vision established in the forest plan. Management areas are drawn on plan maps, so managers know where each emphasis applies.

Matrix is the largest general forest management area and emphasizes active management to achieve healthy ecosystems and wildlife populations. This Management Area varies by alternative.

Backcountry contains large blocks of remote and unroaded forest primarily shaped by natural processes, except where active management is utilized to restore ecosystem composition, structure, function and to provide resiliency against forest health threats. This Management Area varies by alternative and includes most of the Forests' designated Inventoried Roadless Areas.

Ecological Interest Areas are places on the forest that support concentrations of the Forests' biodiversity that would benefit from active management focused on restoring and improving the unique values present. This management area varies by alternative.

Recommended Wilderness are national forest lands evaluated, found to have some wilderness characteristics, and considered for recommendation to the National Wilderness Preservation System. These areas vary by alternative.

Interface contains the most concentrated recreation use on the forest, including developed and dispersed recreation locations, National Recreation Trails and heavily used roads that bring visitors to these locations. This management area has some minor differences among alternatives.



When viewed as a complete forest landscape, these management areas work together to form a network of forest patches, edges, corridors, and mosaics that reflect the forest resources and the ways we manage the land.

Unique Management Areas

Special Interest Areas are those most exceptional ecological communities that serve as core areas for conservation of the most significant and rare elements of biological diversity on the Forests. These areas are generally resilient and not in need of active restoration, although maintenance activities may be needed to maintain their integrity.

Research Natural Areas (Black Mountain and Walker Cove) were designated in 1933 and 1965 respectively, to provide a scientific research baseline for natural forest community conditions where physical and natural processes prevail without human intervention.

Experimental Forests (Bent Creek, Coweeta Hydrological Laboratory and Blue Valley) are jointly managed between the USFS Southern Research Station and the National Forests in North Carolina and serve as real-world laboratories for conducting long-term science and management studies.

The **Appalachian National Scenic Trail** is a long-distance hiking trail established by Congress in 1968 and managed jointly between the US Forest Service, the National Park Service, the Appalachian Trail Conservancy and local affiliated ATC hiking clubs.

National Scenic Byways (the Blue Ridge Parkway, Cherokee Skyway and portions of the Forest Heritage Scenic Byway) are administrative designations recognized by the Federal Highway Administration, part of a larger network of scenic routes that exist throughout the country.

Heritage Corridors includes congressionally designated National Historic Trails (the Trail of Tears and Overmountain Victory Trail), National Millennium Trails (Unicoi Turnpike), and other historic routes eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places. Ongoing research is improving the spatial accuracy of the location of these trails.

Designated Wild and Scenic Rivers (Chattooga, Horsepasture and Wilson Creek) are those river sections designated by Congress to maintain their free-flowing status and outstandingly remarkable values. The portions that cross Nantahala and Pisgah National Forest lands are covered by this management area.

Eligible Wild and Scenic Rivers (see proposed plan for names and segment info) are those evaluated for possible inclusion in the National Wild and Scenic River System. They will be managed to retain their characteristics until further suitability studies or evaluation is completed. The proposed plan identified newly eligible stretches compared to the current plan (see DEIS Appendix F); these are the same across all action alternatives.

Congressionally Designated Wilderness Areas (Ellicott Rock, Joyce-Kilmer Slickrock, Linville Gorge, Middle Prong, Shining Rock and Southern Nantahala) were previously designated by Congress to perpetuate or enhance the natural, untrammeled, and undeveloped character of the area while providing opportunities for primitive and unconfined recreation or solitude.

Wilderness Study Areas (Craggy Mountains, Harper Creek, Lost Cove, Overflow and Snowbird) are designated by Congress to study their potential inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System.

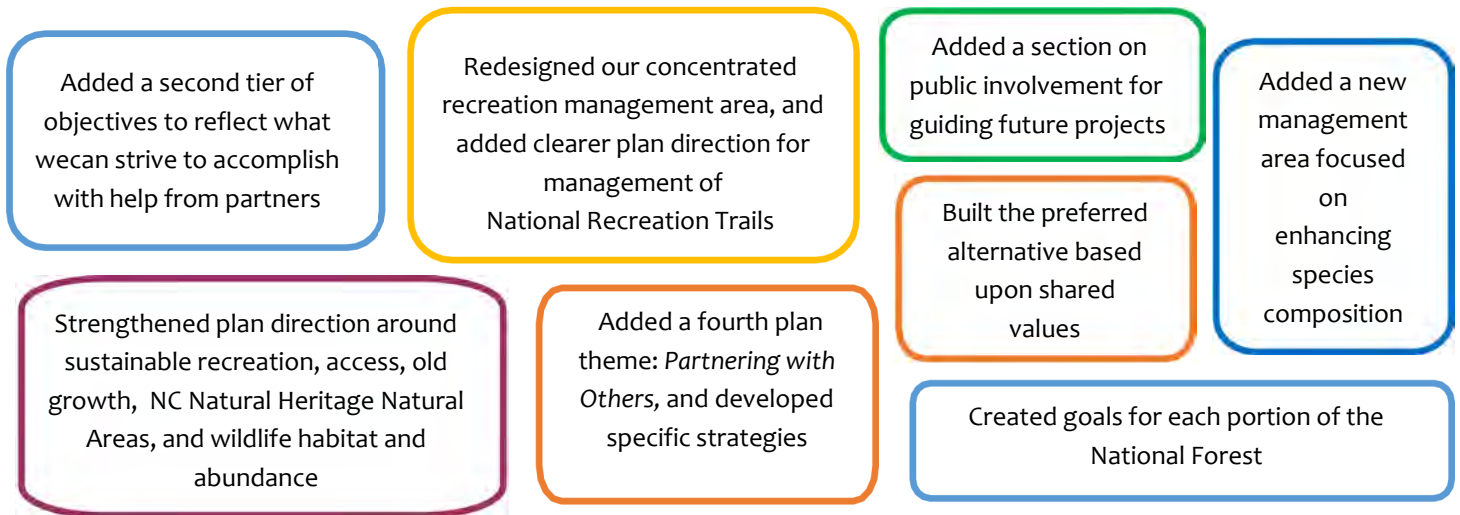
Roan Mountain Management Area is a group of mountains along the North Carolina and Tennessee border with rich temperate diversity, including unique ecological communities, plants and animals.

The **Cradle of Forestry in America** was recognized by Congress as the birthplace of forestry and forestry education in America. The site is managed for educational, interpretive, research and historical purposes.

Moving Forward Together

We are grateful to the thousands of members of the public who shared their input in the development of this plan. As a result of diverse public input, this plan provides a strong foundation for addressing the challenges ahead of us, while moving all our interests forward. The plan's strong emphasis on public involvement provides a platform for us to work together in the years to come.

Here's a **sample** of how public input helped shape every page of the plan:



We hope you will continue to stay engaged as we implement and monitor the new plan —this is where our work together really begins.

Steps to a final Plan

Now that the final Plan, final Environmental Impact Statement and draft Record Of Decision have been released, there is one more step before a final decision is signed. Members of the public who have been engaged in the revision process have an opportunity to file an objection before the final decision is approved. Documents will be available for public review on the National Forests in North Carolina Forest website. The 60-day objection period begins with the publication of the legal notice in the Asheville Citizen Times. The regulations do not allow for extending the objection period.

Who can object? Individuals and entities that submitted substantive formal comments during earlier comment periods are eligible to file an objection. The objection must be based on the same concerns raised in earlier comments unless it concerns an issue that arose after the last formal comment period.

What happens next? The Regional Forester will review objections and work to resolve them. He will issue a written response that may include additional direction for the Forest Supervisor to include in the final plan. The Regional Forester's written response is the final decision, and the Forest Supervisor can then approve the new plan and begin implementation.

For more information, see the NC Plan Revision website at www.fs.usda.gov/goto/nfsnc/nprevision