

# Identifying the need to change the current plan

## Social and Economic Factors

### **Growing as a Tourist Destination**

As population in the area grows, local public lands are increasingly being seen as a place of relaxation; a quiet, peaceful retreat. The Uwharrie is the top tourist destination in Montgomery County, and one of several popular tourist destinations in Randolph County. There may be tourism related opportunities to provide more economic benefits to local communities. The 1986 Plan did not place great emphasis on developing a tourism-related infrastructure that would attract dollars to the extent that is possible today.

### **Nature Hikes and Day Use More Popular**

Many visitors to the Uwharrie seek a place to walk, view nature, and perhaps picnic, swim, or fish. The Forest, with its lake and river frontage, rolling topography, and facilities, is currently providing a variety of these desired opportunities. These opportunities for outdoor recreation are values recognized throughout the collaborative process. These opportunities can help support the health and well-being of the populations of forest visitors, as individuals, couples, and families. There may be ways to make visits more even enjoyable, especially along the Uwharrie National Recreation Trail, Badin area trail systems, and the Uwharrie River. The revised plan could place more emphasis on the hiking trails and day use areas, and recognize their importance to the local social networks.

### **Transportation System in Need of Improvement**

There may be opportunities to improve the existing Forest road and trail system, to enhance public access while minimizing visitor conflicts and resource damage.

The 1986 Plan overestimated the amount of new road construction that would be needed on the Forest. There is a need for the Plan to recognize that new roads should be kept to a minimum, to minimize costs and environmental impacts.

While the 1986 plan has goals and objectives for the trail system, it predates the increased developments and amounts of use in the Badin area and is lacking in specific, focused attention to the trail system there. The system of horse trails and OHV trails in the Badin area came about largely by happenstance – without employment of proper design and construction techniques. With the tremendous increase in trail

use in the Badin area, user conflicts, safety issues, and conflicts with management of the natural and cultural resources in the area have taken center stage in management of the Uwharrie. Plan emphasis on developing and maintaining a premier trail system in Badin that would accommodate high levels of use while minimizing resource impacts could serve as an economic asset to local communities.

### **Interpreting History**

Archeological and historical resources on the Forest provide a unique opportunity for current forest visitors to learn about those who lived here in the past, and at the same time provide an outdoor recreation experience. Careful, innovative planning may ensure that historically important sites are protected yet still accessible for interpretation.

### **Providing Visitor Information**

While the 1986 plan does provide direction for visitor information in regard to trails and cultural resources, this direction is minimal and not a major focus of the management plan. More Plan emphasis on visitor information could increase visitor enjoyment and be a useful tool in controlling visitor impacts.

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## **Ecological Factors**

### **Restoring Native Ecosystems**

Existing Forest ecosystems include native pine and hardwood communities, but also include loblolly pine communities on sites that once supported longleaf pine and oak-hickory forests. The 1986 Plan emphasized timber production and one result was additional loblolly planting. By refocusing the emphasis onto restoration of native ecosystems, vegetation management could include re-introduction of longleaf pine on appropriate sites, and oak-hickory forests on appropriate sites. This could eventually increase the amount of these plant communities to levels that are more like the amount that existed in the past on the lands that became the Uwharrie National Forest.

Woodlands and open, prairie like conditions also existed in the Uwharrie area in the past and supported a variety of sun-loving species that are now rare in the current more closed-canopy conditions. The Endangered Schweinitz's sunflower is one such species. The 1986 Plan did not take this situation into account in setting goals and objectives. Vegetation

management could create the more open, woodland conditions to support these rare species, thus better contributing to native biological diversity.

**Using Fire as a Tool**

Restoring natural fire regimes is important in sustaining some native ecosystems such as longleaf pine and the open woodland conditions utilized by other rare plants. Increasing the use of prescribed fire may allow for better maintenance of these native plant communities.

**Controlling Non-native Invasive Plants**

The 1986 Plan did not emphasize controlling non-native invasive plant species. Setting objectives for addressing this issue would increase our options for sustaining native species and ecosystems. Rare species habitats and streamside areas may be high priority areas for control treatments.

**Consistent Acorn Production**

There is a relatively limited supply of oaks in the age range when acorns are most abundantly produced. Little oak regeneration has occurred under the 1986 Plan. Periodic vegetation management may be needed to maintain a more consistent amount of oaks with prime acorn production capabilities.

**Selective Stream Restoration**

A diversity of aquatic habitats in good to excellent condition exists on the Forest that are providing for a high diversity of fish and mussel species. However, stream channel conditions are variable and opportunities exist to improve stream channel stability and aquatic habitat. The 1986 Plan did not emphasize proactive restoration of streams and aquatic habitats.

**Managing Roads and Trails Effectively to Reduce Impacts to Ecosystems**

Improperly designed roads and trails on the Forests are potential sediment sources that can degrade water quality and aquatic habitats, and impact other forest resources. There is great potential for reducing these impacts through innovative partnerships, trail design, management and maintenance.

# How the Revised Plan will address the Need for Change

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This is a summary of how the revised Plan addresses the issues raised in *The Uwharrie National Forest – a Strategic View* and clarified in *Identifying the need to change the current plan*. More specifics are contained within the sustainability reports.

## Social and Economic Factors

CHANGE FACTOR	EFFECTS OF THE PLAN
<p><b>Growing as a Tourist Destination</b></p> <p><b>Nature Hikes and Day Use More Popular</b></p> <p><b>Transportation System in Need of Improvement</b></p>	<p>The Uwharrie trail systems, river and lake frontage, and premier camping facilities draw tourists from a market area of over 6 million people. The revised Plan has as one of three major themes: “Providing outstanding yet environmentally friendly system of trails and facilities for many types of recreationists.” Many Desired Conditions and Objectives focus on these values and recognize the importance hiking, equestrian use, OHV-use, and mountain biking as economic opportunities for the local communities and social opportunities for the entire market area.</p> <p>The revised Plan also recognizes the need to fill in the gaps in the Uwharrie National Recreation Trail and providing better river access points.</p> <p>The revised Plan also has components developed to minimize new roads and limit the environmental impact of any new roads through proper placement and avoiding certain areas.</p>
<p><b>Interpreting History</b></p>	<p>The revised Plan has as one of its three major themes: “Better Managing Heritage Resources. The Uwharrie has an abundance of artifacts and historic and prehistoric sites within its boundaries. These need protection, but they also provide opportunities for research, teaching, and interpretation.” Throughout the Plan, various plan components address this theme. The Special Areas plan component, for example, contains numerous sites with historical significance and the clear intent for some of these is to provide interpretive opportunities.</p>
<p><b>Providing Visitor Information</b></p>	<p>The revised Plan contains Desired Conditions and Objectives to provide visitor information. This was something of great importance to the members of the collaborative process. Meeting after meeting we heard of the need for a better</p>

informed public, both to make their use of the Forest more pleasant, but also to teach people how to reduce their impacts on the resources.

## Ecological Factors

CHANGE FACTOR	EFFECTS OF THE PLAN
<p><b>Restoring Native Ecosystems</b></p>	<p>The revised Plan has as one of its three major themes: “Restoring the forest to a more natural condition, more like it might have appeared a few centuries ago; For example, reducing the amount of loblolly plantations in favor of reestablishing longleaf pine forests or oak-hickory forests.” The Plan contains Desired Conditions and Objectives toward this goal. An average of 300 acres per year will receive restoration activities.</p> <p>To address the need for emphasizing restoration of the Endangered Schweinitz’s sunflower and other sun-loving species, vegetation management Desired Conditions and Objectives include creating open woodlands, as well as glades and prairie-like conditions, and reintroducing Schweinitz’s sunflower at a number of appropriate sites. The Plan designates a Schweinitz’s Sunflower Habitat Management Area where active restoration will occur in conjunction with other multiple-uses. In addition, guidelines add additional protections by, for example, controlling the timing of mowing fields and roadsides.</p>
<p><b>Using Fire as a Tool</b></p>	<p>The revised Plan sets specific Objectives for accomplishing prescribed burning in the different ecological systems, with the fire return interval dependent on the particular needs of the system. The Plan also specifies that more growing season burns should occur, which will benefit the condition of the ecological systems, and will better reduce fuel loading.</p>
<p><b>Controlling Non-native Invasive Plants</b></p>	<p>The revised Plan contains a Desired Condition and Objective for addressing this issue, and specifies a method for prioritizing where treatments should occur to have the most impact on establishment and maintenance of native biodiversity.</p>
<p><b>Consistent Acorn Production</b></p>	<p>The revised Plan recognizes that fair-sized canopy gaps are necessary regeneration of oak trees, so they may grow from seedling or sprout to become dominant canopy trees with good acorn production. While not setting specific</p>

regeneration objectives, it allows for creation of these regenerating canopy gaps if they are not present.

**Selective Stream Restoration**

The revised Plan contains Objectives for the proactive restoration of streams and aquatic habitats. It also contains a number of guidelines that will ensure management activities have minimal adverse impact on water quality.

**Managing Roads and Trails Effectively to Reduce Impacts to Ecosystems**

The road and trail systems on the Uwharrie are sources of sediment in streams and can impact rare ecological systems if the roads or trails are poorly located, constructed, or maintained. The revised Plan emphasizes, through Desired Conditions, Objectives, and Guidelines, fixing authorized trails that are impacting other resources and closing unauthorized trails on a prioritized basis. In regard to roads, Plan components address minimizing new roads, fixing problem roads, and closing or obliterating unauthorized roads.