



United States  
Department of  
Agriculture

Forest  
Service

National Forests in North Carolina  
Supervisor's Office

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Asheville, NC 28802  
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File Code: 1950-1

Date: October 4, 2004

Dear Interested Citizen:

I have signed the Decision Notice (DN) and Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) for the Wolf Ford Horse Camp Project Environmental Assessment (EA) within Cradle of Forestry in America on the Pisgah Ranger District. The DN discusses in detail my decision and rationale for reaching it.

Copies of the DN and FONSI, and Appendix B – Response to Comments of the EA are enclosed. There are no changes to the EA other than the addition of Appendix B; therefore, final copies of the EA are only being mailed upon request.

This decision is subject to appeal pursuant to 36 CFR 215.11. A written appeal, including attachments, must be postmarked or received within 45 days after the date this notice is published in *The Asheville Citizen-Times*. The appeal shall be sent to USDA, Forest Service, ATTN: Appeals Deciding Officer, 1720 Peachtree Rd, N.W., Suite 811 N, Atlanta, Georgia 30309-9102, within 45 days of the date of this legal notice. Appeals may be faxed to (404) 347-5401. Hand-delivered appeals must be received within normal business hours of 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Appeals may also be mailed electronically in a common digital format to: [appeals-southern-regional-office@fs.fed.us](mailto:appeals-southern-regional-office@fs.fed.us).

Those who meet requirements of 36 CFR 215.13 may appeal this decision. Appeals must meet content requirements of 36 CFR 215.14. For further information on this decision, contact Randy Burgess, District Ranger, Pisgah Ranger District, 1001 Pisgah Highway, Pisgah Forest, North Carolina 28768, phone number (828) 877-3265; or Michael Hutchins, Interdisciplinary Team Leader, PO Box 128, Burnsville, North Carolina, 28714, phone number (828) 682-6146.



If no appeal is received, implementation of this decision may occur on, but not before, five business days from the close of the appeal filing period. If an appeal is received, implementation may not occur for 15 business days following the date of appeal disposition (36 CFR 215.9).

Sincerely,

/s/ John F. Ramey  
JOHN F. RAMEY  
Forest Supervisor



United States  
Department of  
Agriculture

Forest  
Service

October 2004



# Decision Notice, Finding of No Significant Impact & Project-Specific, Non-Significant Forest Plan Amendment #15

## Wolf Ford Horse Camp Project

Pisgah Ranger District, Pisgah National Forest  
Transylvania County, North Carolina



Decision Notice,  
Finding of No Significant Impact,  
& Non-Significant Forest Plan Amendment #15

## Wolf Ford Horse Camp

USDA Forest Service  
Pisgah Ranger District, Pisgah National Forest  
Transylvania County, North Carolina

### Decision and Rationale for the Decision

#### Decision

Based upon my review of the alternatives, I have decided to select **Alternative B** (Selected Alternative) of the Wolf Ford Horse Camp Environmental Assessment (EA) on the Pisgah Ranger District, Pisgah National. The Selected Alternative will:

- ◇ Upgrade the existing campsite (Site #1) at the junction of Forest Service Roads (FSRs) 1206 and 476 to accommodate 10 to 15 campsites for horse and other camping. Once improvements have been made, camping fees will be charged from January through September through use of fee tubes or a reservation system. The following will occur within Site #1: add one or two vault toilets; provide a graveled parking spur and hardened camping space containing ordinary campsite equipment such as tables, grills, etc.; provide a means to secure horses at each site such as a hitching rail, high lead tie, etc.; develop a potable water source; install a flow-through trough (guzzler) for horses; provide an area for disposal of horse droppings, and an informational kiosk will be constructed.
- ◇ A non-system trail/logging road east of FSR 476 between Site #2 and a linear field to the northeast will be closed to equestrian use. A Biologist and a Forester will determine which trees to fall to close it. Access to the existing wildlife field across from Site #1 will be controlled. A wooden drift fence will be constructed along the southeastern edge of Site #1 to discourage “sprawl” and use of the non-system trail/logging road.

- ◇ Change the use at Site #2 to provide parking and allow loading and unloading of horse trailers. Site #2 will be designed for day-use only. A fence will be constructed near the open water, restricting horse access to the stream. A flow-through trough (guzzler) will be added for watering horses and an area will be identified for scraping droppings from trailers. The road surface will be graveled and an informational kiosk will be constructed.
- ◇ Close existing Sites #3, #4, and #5 to dispersed camping.
- ◇ Maintain existing dispersed camping opportunities at Site #6 on FSR 476. The site will be hardened with gravel to reduce impacts to the nearby stream.
- ◇ Amend the Forest Plan (see Forest Plan Consistency below).

#### Rationale

As stated in Section 1.4 of the June 2004 EA, the purpose and need (objectives) for the proposal is to:

- ◇ Maintain limited camping opportunities in the area; and
- ◇ Improve water quality within the area

I believe the Selected Alternative accomplishes these objectives.

My decision will allow limited camping opportunities to continue in an area where such activity has occurred for over 40 years. I believe that by improving three of the existing sites and closing three others strikes a balance between protecting natural resources and meeting public needs. I am aware that my decision to implement this action includes a project-specific amendment to the Forest Plan as roadside

camping is not allowed within the Cradle of Forestry in America (Cradle). Additional information concerning the amendment is provided below.

## Other Alternatives Considered

In addition to the Selected Alternative, I considered two other alternatives in detail: Alternative A – No-Action and Alternative C. A comparison of these alternatives can be found in Section 2.5 of the EA.

### Alternative A – No Action

Under Alternative A, current management plans would continue to guide management of the project area. I did not select this alternative because it would not have improved three existing campsites, closed three existing campsites, protected an existing wildlife field, nor closed a non-system trail/logging road. Alternative A would have maintained use at all of the campsites and the continued use of the non-system trail/logging road. By not taking active management, sediment will continue to impair water quality streams.

### Alternative C

Alternative C was similar to the Selected Alternative, except in one way: Alternative C proposed enlarging Site #3 to make it the parking area and proposed closing Site #2. I did not select this alternative because it would require enlarging Site #3 about 150 feet x 275 feet, requiring disturbance to previously undisturbed soil—slightly increasing adverse water quality effects over the Selected Alternative (Section 3.1.3.1, Chapter 3) and would be slightly less desirable to equestrian users as the parking/off-loading area at Site #3 would not provide water for horses (Section 3.2.3.1, Chapter 3).

### Other Alternatives Not Considered

Section 2.3 of the EA disclosed two alternatives I considered but eliminated from detailed study. Since they were not considered in detail in the EA, they were not considered in the range of alternatives for my decision.

## Public Involvement

On June 27, 2002, the Pisgah Ranger District mailed a scoping letter for several proposed recreation projects—including a proposal for the Wolf Ford Dispersed Campsites. Fourteen letters and e-mails were received as a result of this scoping. Due to other District priorities, the proposal was not developed further.

On February 16, 2004, the proposal was further developed and mailed to the public and other agencies for a 30-day comment period. Five letters or e-mails were received as a result of this scoping. The proposal was listed in the fall 2002, spring 2004, and summer 2004 Schedule of Proposed Actions.

A 30-day Notice and Comment period of the pre-decisional Wolf Ford Horse Camp EA was initiated on June 30, 2004, and was completed on July 30, 2004. One timely letter and one untimely letter were submitted during this period. Appendix B, attached to this decision notice, discloses the comments received and the Agency's response. Following review of comments received, the June 2004 EA was not updated and serves as the final analysis my decision is based.

## Finding of No Significant Impact

After considering the environmental effects described in the EA, I have determined that these actions will not have a significant effect on the quality of the human environment considering the context and intensity of impacts (40 CFR 1508.27). Thus, an environmental impact statement will not be prepared. I base my finding on the following:

1. My finding of no significant environmental effects is not biased by the beneficial effects of the action (Sections 3.1 and 3.2 Chapter 3).
2. There will be no significant effects on public health and safety (Section 1.3, Chapter 1).
3. There will be no significant effects on unique characteristics of the area, because there are no park lands, prime farmlands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical

areas in the project area, nor are there local law or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment (Section 1.7.2.6, Chapter 1).

4. The effects on the quality of the human environment are not likely to be highly controversial because there is no known scientific controversy over the impacts of the project (Sections 3.2, Chapter 3).
5. We have considerable experience with the types of activities to be implemented. The effects analysis shows the effects are not uncertain, and do not involve unique or unknown risk (Sections 3.1 and 3.2, Chapter 3).
6. The action is not likely to establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects, because the project is site specific and effects are expected to remain localized and short-term (Sections 3.1 and 3.2, Chapter 3).
7. The cumulative impacts are not significant (Sections 3.1.2.2 and 3.2.2.2, Chapter 3).
8. The action will have no effect on districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places (Section 1.7.2.5, Chapter 1). The action will also not cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources (Section 1.7.2.5, Chapter 1). A heritage report was completed for this project and was delivered to the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO). On September 28, 2004, SHPO verbally concurred with the Forest Service's finding of "[n]o archaeological objections to the proposal."
9. The action will have no effect on any endangered or threatened species or their habitat that has been determined to be critical under the Endangered Species Act (Act) of 1973, (Sections 1.7.2.1 and 1.7.2.2, Chapter 1 and Appendix A). On August 3, 2004, the US Fish and Wildlife Service concurred with this assessment and "[b]elieve the requirements of section 7 of the Act are fulfilled".
10. The action will not violate Federal, State, and local laws or requirements for the protection of the environment. Applicable laws and regulations were considered in the EA. The action with its project-specific Forest Plan

amendment is consistent with the Nantahala and Pisgah National Forests Land and Resource Management Plan Amendment 5 (Section 1.4.1, Chapter 1).

## **Forest Plan Consistency**

### **Project-Specific Forest Plan Amendment #15**

My decision to implement the Selected Alternative includes a Project-Specific Forest Plan amendment (Section 1.4.2, Chapter 1). Forest Plan standards state, "*Allow no roadside camping*" in the Cradle (Forest Plan Amendment 5, page III-137). I am authorizing a non-significant amendment to, "*Allow roadside camping in the Cradle of Forestry in America in designated areas only—all other roadside camping in the Cradle will not be allowed.*"

### **Determination That Project-Specific, Forest Plan Amendment #15 Is Not Significant Under NFMA**

I have determined this amendment is not a significant amendment under the National Forest Management Act (NFMA) implementing regulations [36 CFR 219.10(f)]. In reaching this conclusion, I considered the following factors from Forest Service Handbook 1909.12, section 5.32, Process to Amend a Forest Plan.

#### **Timing**

A change is less likely to result in a significant plan amendment if the change is likely to take place after the plan period (first decade). This plan amendment is taking place immediately (during the planning period for the current Forest Plan) and will be a permanent change to the Cradle of Forestry in America; however, timing in and of itself is not enough to warrant a significant amendment.

#### **Location and Size**

The smaller the area affected, the less likely the change is to be a significant change to the Forest Plan. The Selected Alternative will require an amendment for allowing roadside camping at two sites in the Cradle—less than 10 acres or

0.16% of the total ~6,400 acres in the Cradle. In addition, there has been historical roadside camping use at this location that predates the Forest Plan; this historical use appears to have not been considered in the Forest Plan when it was completed in 1987.

### Goals, Objectives, and Outputs

An action is more likely to be a significant Forest Plan amendment if it alters the long-term relationship between levels of goods and services projected by the Forest Plan and particularly if it will forego the opportunity to achieve an output in later years. The amendment is part of my decision to allow limited roadside camping in the area and improve water quality in the area and does not contribute towards significance. Given the historical camping use in the area (pre-Forest Plan and Cradle designation) and the fact that this use has continued during the life of the Plan, there has been no discernable effect to achieving Forest Plan goals and outputs to date. Continuing this use would not affect Forest goals and outputs in the future.

### Management Prescription

A change is more likely to require a significant amendment if it will apply to future decisions throughout the planning area. The amendment is for just this project. The changes should not affect future actions. Thus, the lack of change of prescription beyond this project indicates non-significance for the amendment.

### **Administrative Review and Contacts**

This decision is subject to appeal pursuant to 36 CFR 215.11. A written appeal, including

attachments, must be postmarked or received within 45 days after the date this notice is published in *The Asheville Citizen-Times*. The appeal shall be sent to USDA, Forest Service, ATTN: Appeals Deciding Officer, 1720 Peachtree Rd, N.W., Suite 811 N, Atlanta, Georgia 30309-9102, within 45 days of the date of this legal notice. Appeals may be faxed to (404) 347-5401. Hand-delivered appeals must be received within normal business hours of 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Appeals may also be mailed electronically in a common digital format to:

**appeals-southern-regional-office@fs.fed.us**

Those who meet requirements of 36 CFR 215.13 may appeal this decision. Appeals must meet content requirements of 36 CFR 215.14. For further information on this decision, contact Randy Burgess, District Ranger, Pisgah Ranger District, 1001 Pisgah Highway, Pisgah Forest, North Carolina 28768, Phone: 828-877-3265; or Michael Hutchins, Pisgah National Forest NEPA Coordinator, PO Box 128, Burnsville, North Carolina, 28714, Phone: 828-682-6146.

### **Implementation Date**

As per 36 CFR 215.9, if no appeal is received, implementation of this decision may occur on, but not before, the 5<sup>th</sup> business day following the close of the appeal-filing period (215.15). When an appeal is filed, implementation may occur on, but not before the 15<sup>th</sup> business day following the date of appeal disposition (36 CFR 215.2).

*/s/John F. Ramey*

*10/04/04*

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**JOHN F. RAMEY**

Forest Supervisor  
National Forests in North Carolina

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**Date**

**APPENDIX B – RESPONSE TO COMMENTS  
FOR THE  
WOLF FORD HORSE CAMP  
ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT**

**Wolf Ford Horse Camp**  
Environmental Assessment

**Response to Comments**

**Interest 1:**

**Support for Alternative B – Proposed Action**

## General Discussion

The formal 30-day Notice and Comment period for the Wolf Ford Horse Camp Environmental Assessment began June 30, 2004, and ended on July 30, 2004. One timely letter and one untimely letter were submitted during this period.

## Substantive Comments

To be eligible to appeal the decision on this proposal, individuals must provide comments that are both timely [36 CFR 215.6(a)] and substantive (36 CFR 215.2). Substantive comments are defined as: “*Comments within the scope of the proposed action are specific to the proposed action, have a direct relationship to the proposed action and include supporting reasons for the Responsible Official to consider.*” A comment stating support of an alternative without rationale for the support is not considered substantive. Comments below are grouped by Interest—not all comments received are substantive (as defined by 36 CFR 215.2).

### Interest 1: Support for Alternative B – Proposed Action

#### Comments on this Interest:

Dave McHenry – North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission

#### **Comment 1-1:**

*“The Commission recommends implementation of the preferred Alternative B. The use of camping area 2 under this alternative, although closer to a comparatively larger stream than area 3, may reduce potential effects of the project on aquatic resources because a horse trough would be constructed and a fence installed to discourage watering in the adjoining stream. These measures were not applicable if area 3 was utilized for the parking area. In addition, the Commission supports the efforts identified in the EA to minimize potential adverse effects of the camps on aquatic and terrestrial resources, in particular the closing of the linear field and logging road to trail riding. We also support the continued, historical use of the remaining camp areas by hunters and fishermen.” (DM)*

#### **Agency Response to Comment 1-1:**

Comments are noted.

Brian Cole – United States Fish and Wildlife Service

#### **Comment 1-2:**

*“We have no major concerns regarding the proposed actions and concur with your assessment that Alternative B would have the most environmental benefits, particularly improvements in water quality. Similarly, we concur with the conclusion in the Environmental Assessment that the proposed project will have no effect on any species that is federally listed as endangered or threatened and believe the requirements of section 7 of the Act are fulfilled. Obligations under section 7 of the Act must be reconsidered if: (1) new information reveals impacts of this identified action that may affect endangered or threatened species or critical habitat in a manner not previously considered, (2) this action is subsequently modified in a manner not considered in this review, or (3) a new species is listed or critical habitat is determined that may be affected by the action.”*

#### **Agency Response to Comment 1-2:**

Comments are noted.