

Special Designated Areas on the Nantahala and Pisgah National Forests

April 17, 2014



Why we are talking about special designated areas today?

- 2012 Planning Rule Language
 - Identify existing designated areas and determine whether to recommend any additional areas for designation.
- In May 2013, our plan revision team committed to the public to continuing the conversation on designated areas
- We have received numerous comments from the public on this topic



Special Designated Areas

- What are Designated Areas? – a review
- What special designations do we have in our current Forest Plan?
- What have we heard from the public on this topic over the last year?
- Proposed criteria for special designated areas
- Objectives for this afternoon

Designated Areas

- 2012 Planning Rule Definition
 - An area or feature identified and managed to maintain its unique special character or purpose.

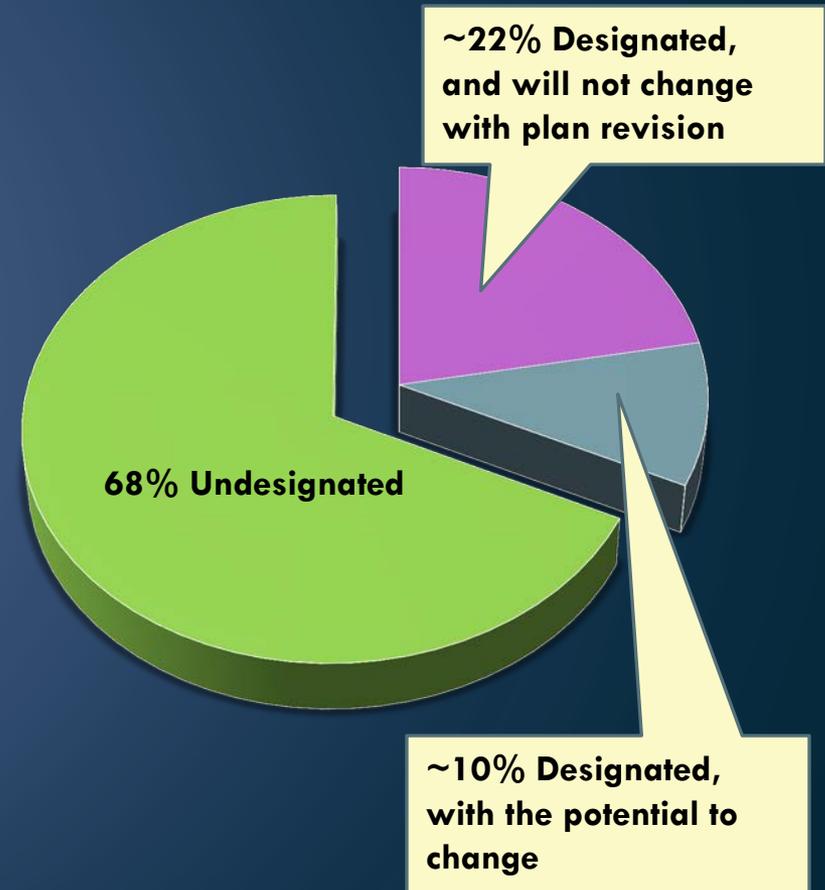
Other uses may be permitted in the areas, to the extent that these uses are in harmony with the purpose for which the area was designated.



Current Forest Plan

- 6 Wildernesses
- 5 Wilderness Study Areas
- 40 Special interest areas
 - 35 botanical/zoological
 - 9 geological
 - 5 scenic area
- 33 Inventoried Roadless Areas
- 3 Experimental Forests
- 2 Research Natural Areas
- Cradle of Forestry
- Appalachian Trail Corridor
- Roan Mountain

Nantahala and Pisgah NFs



Special Interest Areas – 1987 Plan

40 areas that are registered with the State Natural Heritage Program and administratively designated in the Forest Plan

- **35 Botanical-Zoological Areas**
- **9 Geological Areas**
- **5 Scenic Areas**



Types of Designated Areas

- **Botanical/Zoological** – a unit of land that has significant elements of plant and animal diversity (Linville Gorge)
- **Geological** – a unit of land with outstanding formations or unique geological features of the earth's development (Bonas Defeat Gorge)
- **Scenic** – a unit of land with outstanding natural beauty that requires special management to preserve this beauty (Whitewater Falls)



Types of Designations

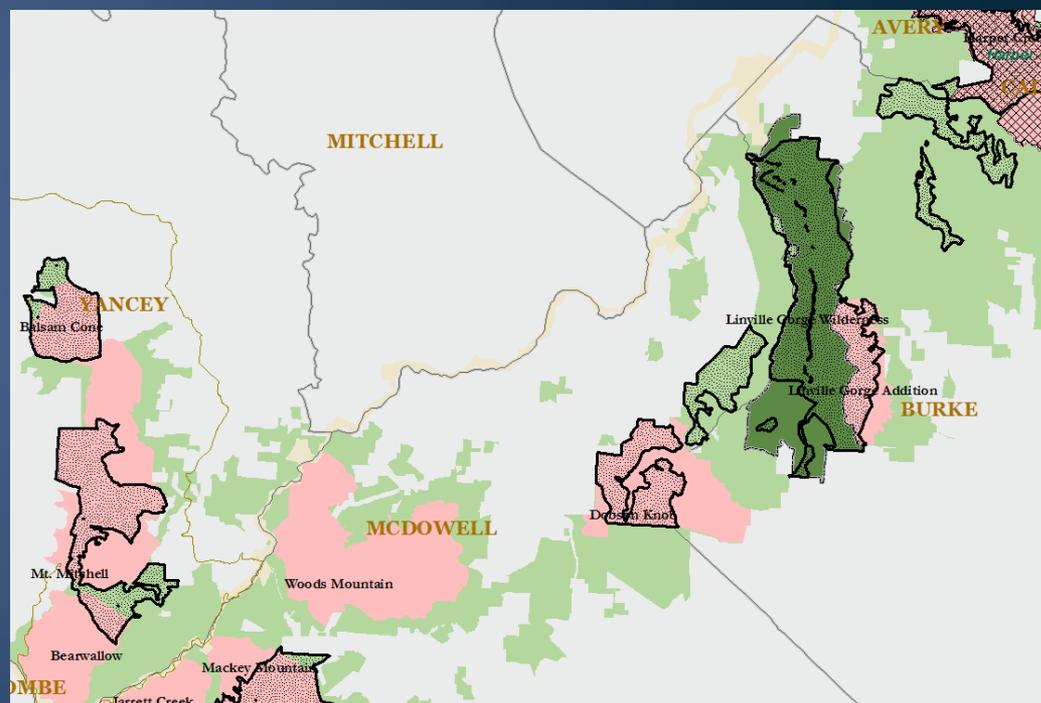
- **Recreational** – areas that have outstanding combinations of recreation opportunities
- **Historical** – a unit of land possessing a significant site or concentration of sites, buildings, structures, or objects united historically or prehistorically (Cradle of Forestry)



Current Forest Plan

Designated large and medium old growth patches

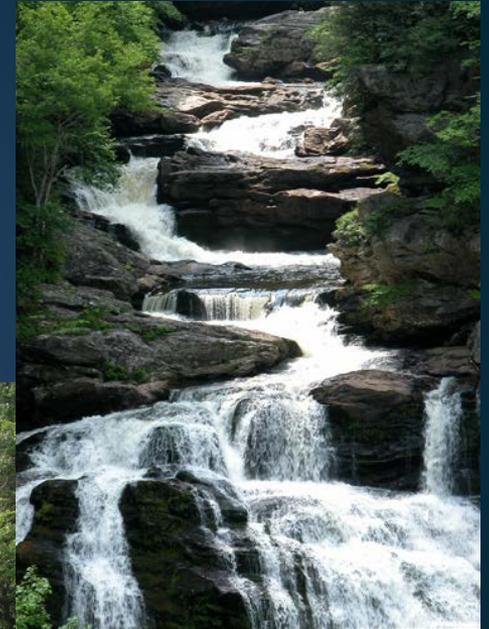
- Approximately 60% of designated medium and large old growth patches overlap with other designated areas



*Look at some of our existing designated areas.
What attributes do they exhibit?*

Cullasaja Gorge

- Numerous rare plants
- Unique natural community
- Scenic beauty
- Geologically unique



Ralph Preston

Looking Glass Rock



- An outstanding monolith and geologic landmark from the Blue Ridge Parkway.
- Has been proposed for the National Registry of Natural Landmarks

Special Designated Areas

- Highly distinctive areas on the Forest
- Giving an area a special designation in the Forest Plan will *not necessarily preclude management activities.*



Roan Mountain – grassy balds

What have we heard
from you on this topic?



May 2013, six public workshops...

- What attributes would make an area worthy of designation?
- What attributes would make an area not suitable for designation?



Some of what we heard...

Designated areas for recreation users

Don't designate areas that need active management

Rare and unique plant communities

Consider the NC Natural Heritage Program's Significant Natural Heritage Areas

Highly roaded or fragmented areas are not appropriate

Unique geological features

No additional designated areas

Designated rock-hounding areas

Unique areas that are not degraded by past management

Recognition that sometimes identifying an area on a map brings unwanted attention

November and December 2013

Six open houses

Started the discussion on what needs to change in the revised forest plan



Some of what we heard...

More active
management at
Cradle of Forestry

Designated areas for
recreation users

No more designated
areas – Forest needs
flexibility to manage

Need to reduce
current designations

Don't allow designations
to limit public access to
the forest

Need updated direction
for management on
Roan Mtn.

Keep restrictions to a minimum
in designated areas

Need for rock-
hounding areas

Need updated protection of
old growth



Concerns with increasing the number of special designations on the forest:

- There will be less flexibility to actively manage the forest
- There will be less opportunity for active restoration of areas in need of restoration
- There will be less access to parts of the forest
- Land will be taken out of the timber base
- There will be less early successional habitat
- Designating areas on a map may lead to unintended impacts to the area

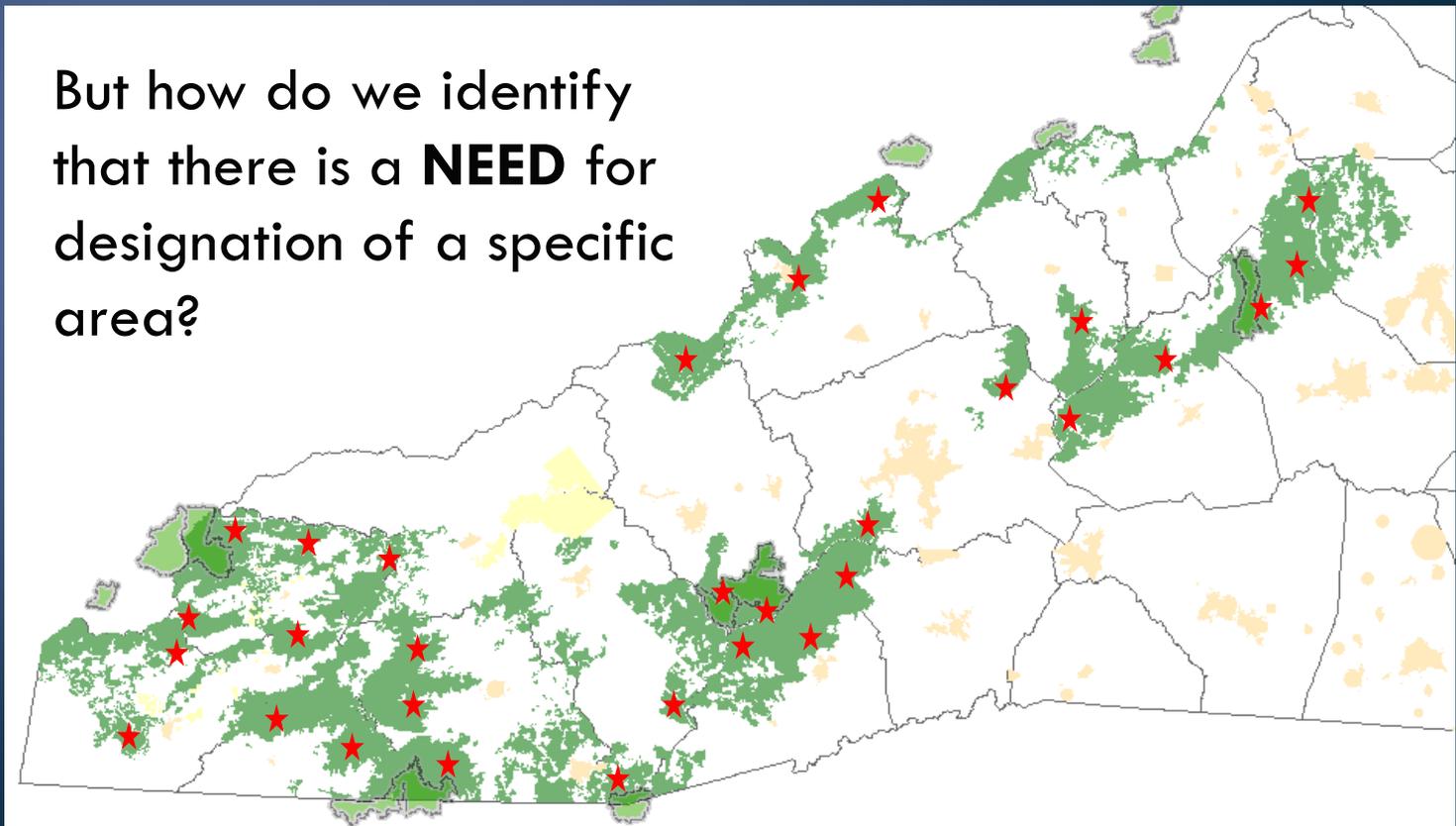
Concerns with not designating additional areas:

- Loss of rare habitats, rare plants, or rare wildlife species
- Core interior forest will be fragmented by management
- Timber cutting will degrade unique areas
- Areas of scenic beauty will be compromised
- Cultural or historical resources will be compromised
- Existing designated areas will be over-loved, primarily by recreationists interested in visiting special areas

Focus on NEED vs. OPPORTUNITY

Opportunities for additional areas abound - we all can point to special places on the forest

But how do we identify that there is a **NEED** for designation of a specific area?



Focus on NEED vs. OPPORTUNITY

- There must be a compelling need for a specific area to be designated (ex. rare habitats that are underrepresented in currently designated areas)
- We will be looking at existing special interest areas as well as potential new areas
- Consideration of new land acquisitions that may warrant designation
 - Roughly half of Forest Service land acquisitions since 1992 are directly adjacent to currently designated areas

Potential criteria for designation

1. The area has an abundance of unique attributes such as botanical, geologic, scenic, and recreational experiences
2. The area's unique attributes are currently underrepresented in existing designated areas
3. The area requires specific direction for maintaining or protecting the unique features that are intrinsic to the area
4. Designation of the area is responsive to a specific need on the Nantahala and Pisgah NFs

Additional considerations...

- Forest leadership does not believe we need to add vast acreages of new designated areas
 - We already have plan direction to address rare plants, rare animals, and many other unique resources
- Many of the Forest's distinctive areas were identified in the original plan



Objective – today or soon afterwards

To have a set of criteria for evaluating potential designated areas that all stakeholders can live with.



What we would like to discuss this afternoon

- Considering the four criteria just discussed, is there some criteria for evaluating special designated areas that we have missed?

After break....

- What is one area that you think the Forest should either consider designating or an existing designated area that you think the forest should modify in the revised plan, and WHY?