

Rapid Assessment For the Project Record

Assessment:

Courthouse Creek Analysis Area (AA)

Date:

9/3/09

Management Area Objectives

- 2C** Emphasize visually pleasing scenery. Emphasize motorized recreation use. The management area is classed as unsuitable for timber production in order to meet visual quality objectives or lands are not efficient for timber production. Manage habitat of older forests primarily for squirrel, pileated woodpecker, and animals requiring similar environments. (1,131 acres)
- 3B** Emphasize sustained yield timber management. Close most roads to motorized vehicles. Permit road construction. Base method of harvest on a site-specific analysis. Manage habitat of mixed ages of forests primarily for turkey, and animals requiring similar environments. (1,331 acres)
- 4A** Emphasize visually pleasing scenery. Emphasize non-motorized recreation use. Close most roads to motorized vehicles. Permit timber management modified to emphasize visual quality and wildlife benefits. Permit road construction. Manage habitat of mature forests primarily for bear, and animals requiring similar environments. (447 acres)
- 4C** Emphasize visually pleasing scenery. Emphasize non-motorized recreation use. Close most roads to motorized vehicles. Classify land as not suitable for timber production in order to meet visual quality objectives and wildlife habitat needs, or lands not cost efficient for timber management over the planning horizon. Manage habitat of older forests primarily for bear, and animals requiring similar environments. (1,250 acres)
- 4D** Emphasize high quality wildlife habitat particularly for black bear. Emphasize non-motorized recreation use. Close most roads to motorized vehicles. Permit timber production, but modify to emphasize visual quality objectives and wildlife habitat needs. Permit road construction. Base method of harvest on a site-specific analysis. Do not harvest areas larger than 25 acres in size when even-aged regeneration is selected. [Amendment #4] Manage habitat of mature forests primarily for bear, and animals requiring similar environments. (2,879 acres)

Existing Condition(s)	Desired Condition(s)	Statement(s) of Need	Data/Responsibility
Recreation			
* (1) There are three system trails in the AA: Courthouse Falls (hiking only), Art Loeb Trail (hiking only), and Summey Cove (hiking & biking). The Summey Cove Trail has erosion occurring near Courthouse Creek.	<i>Manage all trails to minimize adverse effects on riparian area resources.</i> (Forest Plan, page III-185)	There is a need to improve sections of Summey Cove Trail to reduce impacts to Courthouse Creek (stabilization/vegetation) – relocation of trail would not be as effective at reducing impacts	Lorie/Brady/Jeff to review stabilization efforts to address crossings and repair/install additional water diverting structures.
* (2) There are numerous dispersed recreation sites on FSR 140 (Courthouse Creek Road).	<i>a. Permanently close and rehabilitate sites that cannot accommodate use without unacceptable impacts to riparian area resources. b. Rehabilitate active sites that are contributing visible sediment to the stream channel. Use site-specific analysis to determine rehabilitation needs that will prevent or minimize sediment from reaching the stream channel.</i> (Forest Plan, page III-	There is a need to repair and/or relocate dispersed recreation sites that are causing impacts to aquatic resources.	Decommission/rehabilitate all but two dispersed campsites since they are contributing to erosion/sedimentation.

Existing Condition(s)	Desired Condition(s)	Statement(s) of Need	Data/Responsibility
	184)		
Archaeology			
(1) The Courthouse Creek AA is an important Cherokee Nation “mythscape” relative to Judaculla (giant)	<i>Protect heritage resources by: [P]rotecting appropriate heritage resource properties for ceremonial and religious purposes by Native Americans. (Forest Plan, page III-9). Foster public use and enjoyment of heritage resources through interpretation or development of suitable sites. (Forest Plan, page III-10)</i>	There is a need to ensure management activities do not impact Cherokee Indian ceremonial or religious “mythscape” and identify opportunities for developing interpretation of “mythscape”	Scott to review potential interpretation
(2) Past heritage surveys have identified important archaeological properties and others are likely in the AA	<i>Protect heritage resources by: Completing heritage resource inventories prior to ground disturbing or land transfer projects. (Forest Plan, page 9)</i>	There is a need to complete an archaeological survey/report prior to project implementation	Scott to review map of existing properties and develop interpretive options
Scenery			
(1) The analysis area is bordered by the Blue Ridge Parkway to the north, which has a popular scenic attraction and observation area at Devil’s Courthouse. Mountain Heritage Scenic Byway (NC215) passes through the area to the west and south. Centrally located in the analysis area is Courthouse Falls, a scenic attraction accessed by FSR140 and Summey Cove Trail.	Management areas 2C & 4C are unsuitable for commercial timber production and serve as a scenic buffer along the BRP and NC215. All portions of MA 3B & 4D visible from the BRP must meet a PR VQO. Visible foreground along Summey Cove Trail and FSR140 must meet a PR VQO in MA 4D. All remaining portions of MA 3B & 4D must meet M VQO. Visible portions of MA 4A must meet PR VQO, except where seen in the foreground of NC215 where it must meet R VQO.	There is a need to insure all proposed activities meet the assigned VQO’s. This should be done through leaf-off viewpoint identification, GIS analysis, use of computer simulations, and design features incorporated into proposed activities.	A preliminary seen-area analysis was done in GIS to determine analysis area VQO’s based on assumed viewpoints on the BRP, Devil’s Courthouse, NC215, Courthouse Falls, Summey Cove Trail, and FSR140. A more detailed scenery analysis will be conducted when possible treatment areas are identified.
Roads			
(1) The Blue Ridge Parkway (BRP) forms the northern boundary of the AA with the Devils Courthouse overlook on it and NC 215 (part of the Forest Heritage National Scenic Byway) forms the southern and	Management Area (MA) 2C Forest Plan direction and standards are achieved (see also Scenery above)	There is a need to design proposed management activities to meet MA 2C direction and standards.	

Existing Condition(s)	Desired Condition(s)	Statement(s) of Need	Data/Responsibility																								
western boundary of the AA.																											
(2) FSR 140 is the only open Forest Service road in the AA, has a B1 road management objective (RMO) on its open portion (open with higher mtc standards), and a ford on Courthouse Creek that is causing sedimentation/erosion	<i>Manage roads, trails, and other travelways consistent with Management Area direction. Identify where existing road conditions do not meet water quality standards and develop strategies to bring them into compliance.</i> (Forest Plan, page III-46)	There is a need to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Change the RMO from B1 to C1 due to funding • *Seek funding for replacing the ford with a bridge – improve ford in the mean time to reduce aquatic impacts 	Amber to determine open road density by MA Bridge to be funded by stimulus package.																								
*(3) FSR 140B has a washed out culvert on Mill Station Creek from the 2004 tropical storms	<i>Identify where existing road conditions do not meet water quality standards and develop strategies to bring them into compliance.</i> (Forest Plan, page III-46)	There is a need to replace the culvert to reduce aquatic impacts																									
(4) There is unauthorized off-highway-vehicle (OHV) use on FSR 140A	<i>Limit opportunities outside of established OHV areas for primitive roads suitable for travel only by off-highway vehicles.</i> (Forest Plan, page III-46)	There is a need to control/manage unauthorized OHV use in the AA to reduce impacts to resources																									
(5) <table border="1" data-bbox="94 768 485 987"> <thead> <tr> <th>MA</th> <th>Miles of Road</th> <th>Sq. Miles of MA</th> <th>Miles per Sq. Mile</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>2C</td> <td>0.34</td> <td>1.7</td> <td>0.2</td> </tr> <tr> <td>3B</td> <td>0.88</td> <td>2.1</td> <td>0.4</td> </tr> <tr> <td>4D</td> <td>2.7</td> <td>4.5</td> <td>0.6</td> </tr> </tbody> </table> Road 140 used in this calculation	MA	Miles of Road	Sq. Miles of MA	Miles per Sq. Mile	2C	0.34	1.7	0.2	3B	0.88	2.1	0.4	4D	2.7	4.5	0.6	<table border="1" data-bbox="514 768 716 987"> <thead> <tr> <th>MA</th> <th>Miles per Sq. Mile</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>2C</td> <td>2.0</td> </tr> <tr> <td>3B*</td> <td>0.5</td> </tr> <tr> <td>4D*</td> <td>0.25</td> </tr> </tbody> </table> *Where existing open road densities exceed [0.5 or 0.25] miles per square mile, and, if closure of existing roads is prohibitive for administrative or legal reasons, then document these exceptions to the standard and investigate strategies to reduce the open road density. (Forest Plan, page III-69, 87)	MA	Miles per Sq. Mile	2C	2.0	3B*	0.5	4D*	0.25	There is a need to determine if there are open roads in these MAs that can be closed to reduce open road densities within them.	IDT to identify during project development roads that can be closed to reduce open road densities where available.
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Wildlife																											
*(1) FSR 140A currently has a D0 RMO (closed & not maintained as a linear wildlife opening - LWO) and is closed by berm	<i>Manage roads, trails, and other travelways consistent with Management Area direction.</i> (Forest Plan, page III-46)	There is a need to close this road by gate (administrative access) and change the RMO from D0 to D1 (LWO) to improve wildlife habitat																									
*(2) FSRs 5030 & 5037 currently have D1 RMOs (LWOs w/ bikes/horses allowed) – there is no	<i>Manage closed forest development roads for a wide range of non-motorized uses. Minimize conflicting uses (example bicycle</i>	There is a need to change the RMOs of these roads from D1 to D5 (bikes/horses prohibited) and daylight about 30 feet either side where other resources are not impacted to	Sandy to review Mae Lee’s NEPA for including these roads in bike/horse																								

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daylighting currently along these roads	<i>use vs. linear wildlife opening). Resolve conflicts using an ID team approach and coordinate with other federal, state, and county agencies and user groups. (Forest Plan, page III-46)</i>	improve wildlife habitat	prohibition
*(3) There is currently 7.4 acres of grass/forb habitat (LWO) maintained in the AA, and 8.2 acres of wildlife fields	<i>Provide at least 0.5% of Management Areas 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5 in grass/forb openings at any one time including mowed landings and roads except where desired conditions for forest interior birds or old growth management are specified. (Forest Plan, page III-23)</i>	There is a need to develop an additional 11.3 acres of grass/forb habitat in the AA to improve wildlife habitat, including using log landings	Sandy to determine locations in the AA (log landings too)
*(4) There are feral hogs/wild boars in the AA	<i>Use Integrated Pest Management (IPM) as the strategy in managing pest populations to achieve resource management objectives. (Forest Plan, page III-52)</i>	There is a need to control/manage populations of non-native hogs/boars to better maintain desired habitats	Sandy to work with NCWRC on control/management strategies
Lands/SUP			
(1) There are existing outfitter guide permits in the AA for outfitting and guiding. Activities include hiking and backpacking, fishing and rock climbing.	<i>Respond to special use requests according to the following priorities: - Those relating to public safety, health and welfare, e.g., highways, power lines, and public service improvements; - Those contributing to the general public benefit associated with National Forest resources; and - Those that benefit only private users, e.g., road permits, rights-of-way for power lines, telephones, waterlines etc. (Forest Plan, page III-44). Allow organized recreational events when they meet management area direction. Require a permit. Forest Plan, III-22</i>	There is a need to maintain existing organized recreation SUPs where compatible with other resources.	Continue to process permits as they arise and manage existing permits.
Aquatics/Hydrology			
*(1) There is a seepy area near Summey Cove that may have bog potential	<i>Protect the following community types when identified as unique in the botanical or wildlife analysis: caves and rare plant communities including bogs, rocks cliffs, granitic domes, high elevation rocky summits, barrens and glades, balds, boulder field forests and seeps (Forest Plan, page III-23)</i>	There is a need to improve resiliency and size of potential bog to improve habitat diversity	In season survey needed to determine character and potential rare plants

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<p>* (2) There are streams in the AA that do not have brook trout within them that may be able to sustain them if suitable habitat was available</p>	<p><i>Use habitat restoration, improvement, and reintroduction to re-establish or expand native species populations and diversity (Forest Plan, page III-24). Manage streams for wild trout where conditions are favorable. Identify trout streams using designations by the North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission or where population inventories indicate self-sustaining populations. (Forest Plan, page III-185)</i></p>	<p>There is a need to restore brook trout in Mill Station Creek.</p>	<p>Lorie/Sheryl to work with NCWRC, Trout Unlimited, and organizations to restore brook trout to Mill Station Creek.</p>
Botany/Old Growth/Non-native Invasives			
<p>(1) There are numerous rare plants (at least 3 listed species) near the BRP, within drains, and on rock outcrops (including Pilot Mountain)</p>	<p><i>Protect the following community types when identified as unique in the botanical or wildlife analysis: caves and rare plant communities including bogs, rocks cliffs, granitic domes, high elevation rocky summits, barrens and glades, balds, boulder field forests and seeps. (Forest Plan, page III-23).</i></p>	<p>There is a need to complete a botanical survey and BE/BA prior to project implementation to meet ESA and Forest Plan direction</p>	<p>Dave to survey activity areas once they are identified. In season survey needed for proposed activity areas.</p>
<p>(2) There is a proposed State Natural Heritage Area (SNHA) in unsuited lands near the BRP—this proposed SNHA is not a Forest Plan Special Interest Area (Forest Plan, page III-190 – III-208)</p>	<p>N/A</p>	<p>N/A</p>	<p>Coordinate with State NHA program</p>
<p>(3) There is large patch O/G in unsuited lands near the BRP and 185 acres of small patch O/G. There is 641 acres of Forest Plan initial inventory O/G. There is proposed Messick O/G in the unsuited lands near the BRP.</p>	<p><i>SMALL PATCHES: In each compartment containing more than 250 acres of national forest land, select a small patch for future old growth management. If 5% of the compartment acres are already part of a large or medium patch, an additional small patch is not needed. (Forest Plan, page III-27)</i></p>	<p>There is a need to designate at least 211 acres total of small patch O/G in Compartments 88, 89, 92, 93, and 107 to meet Forest Plan O/G direction</p>	<p>Dave to survey activity areas once they are identified. In season survey needed for proposed activity areas.</p>
<p>* (4) There are non-native invasive plants in the southern portion of the AA and opening forested lands will likely increase habitat for non-native invasives</p>	<p><i>Use Integrated Pest Management (IPM) as the strategy in managing pest populations to achieve resource management objectives. (Forest Plan, page III-52)</i></p>	<p>There is a need to control/manage non-native invasive species in the AA, especially forested areas opened through management activities</p>	<p>Seasonal surveys needed to assess species/locations – typically coincides with harvest stand surveys.</p>
Vegetation			

Existing Condition(s)	Desired Condition(s)	Statement(s) of Need	Data/Responsibility												
(1) The current transportation plan appears to be adequate for potential timber harvest – temporary roads may be needed	<i>Construct temporary roads only for non-recurrent use. Do not plan or permit purchasers to construct temporary roads in lieu of building specified roads needed for future recurrent management of the area.</i> (Forest Plan, page 50)	There may be a need for temporary roads to facilitate potential timber harvest	Ted to identify locations of potential temporary roads												
*(2) There is currently 3 acres of group selection in the AA that provides habitat diversity (stand 92-21)	<i>Assure a regular and sustained flow of habitats across the Forests through space and time for diversity and viability of plant and animal populations.</i> (Forest Plan, page III-29)	There is a need to maintain established group selection harvest prescriptions in the AA	Ted to identify additional group selection opportunities												
(3) There is currently no 0-10 year early successional habitat (ESH) in the AA	<table border="1" data-bbox="512 548 995 824"> <thead> <tr> <th data-bbox="512 548 646 597">MA</th> <th data-bbox="646 548 814 597">Compartment</th> <th data-bbox="814 548 995 597">AA</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td data-bbox="512 597 646 683">2A</td> <td data-bbox="646 597 814 683">At least 5% Not to exceed 10%</td> <td data-bbox="814 597 995 683">At least 5% Not to exceed 10%</td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="512 683 646 769">1B & 3B</td> <td data-bbox="646 683 814 769">At least 5% Not to exceed 15%</td> <td data-bbox="814 683 995 769">At least 5% Not to exceed 15%</td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="512 769 646 824">4A & 4D</td> <td data-bbox="646 769 814 824">Not to exceed 10%</td> <td data-bbox="814 769 995 824">Not to exceed 10%</td> </tr> </tbody> </table> (Forest Plan, page III-31)	MA	Compartment	AA	2A	At least 5% Not to exceed 10%	At least 5% Not to exceed 10%	1B & 3B	At least 5% Not to exceed 15%	At least 5% Not to exceed 15%	4A & 4D	Not to exceed 10%	Not to exceed 10%	There is a need to develop between 64 – 192 acres of ESH in MA 3B and up to 324 acres of ESH in MAs 4A and 4D	Ted to identify candidate stands for developing ESH
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2A	At least 5% Not to exceed 10%	At least 5% Not to exceed 10%													
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4A & 4D	Not to exceed 10%	Not to exceed 10%													
*(4) There is one hemlock woolly adelgid (HWA) conservation area in Compartment 89 (Courthouse Creek area) with most of the hemlock killed. Loss of hemlock from HWA in riparian areas may have long-term impacts on aquatic habitat and hydrologic function.	<i>Develop conservation strategies for sensitive species beginning with those of highest risk.</i> (Forest Plan, page III-23). <i>Use Integrated Pest Management (IPM) as the strategy in managing pest populations to achieve resource management objectives.</i> (Forest Plan, page III-52).	There is a need to establish an additional hemlock conservation area in the AA to prolong hemlock diversity and to identify suitable replacement species (likely white pine) for hemlock in riparian areas.	Ted to determine feasibility of a new hemlock conservation area Lorie/Ted to determine if suitable replacement species can be established												
*(5) All regeneration harvested stands are candidates for timber stand improvement (TSI) through manual and chemical treatments	<i>Provide for stocking control and species variety through timber stand improvement practices.</i> (Forest Plan, page III-37)	There is a need to control stocking levels and species diversity through TSI applications	Ted to identify candidate stands for TSI												
*(6) The Bee Tree timber sale initiated pre-harvest oak shelterwood treatments on 16 acres in stands 92-5 and 92-6	<i>Utilize Regeneration Potential Surveys. Pre-Harvest Site Preparation and Oak Shelterwood treatments to ensure desired stocking levels or advance growth dependent species, especially northern red oak.</i> (Forest Plan, page III-37)	There is a need to maintain appropriate species diversity and stocking by harvesting overstory trees in stands 92-5 and 92-6 and to establish additional stands suitable for pre-harvest oak shelterwood treatments	Ted to identify if any additional pre-harvest oak shelterwood treatments can be established												
Fire/Fuels															

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<p>* (1) The 1,600 acre Pilot Mountain prescribed burn was implemented in Spring 2008. There is no potential for site prep prescribed burning.</p>	<p><i>Use prescribed fire (controlled fire) to create and maintain desired vegetative composition, scenic vistas, and wildlife habitat, reduce fire hazards, control forest pests, and accomplish other management objectives including site preparation. (Forest Plan, page III-52)</i></p>	<p>There is a need to ensure the Pilot Mountain burn is implemented on a periodic basis to reduce rhododendron and improve habitat.</p>	
<p>* (2) There is NFS/PVT land interface along the southern boundary of the AA and prescribed burning to reduce fuels and wildfire threat would be difficult due to establishing control lines.</p>	<p><i>Wildfire detection and suppression will be commensurate with the <u>resource values protected</u>. Detection and suppression will be planned based on an analysis of probable fire locations, expected fire intensities, potential threat to health, safety, and adjacent properties, and potential threat to resources. (Forest Plan, page III-51)</i></p>	<p>There is a need to reduce wildfire risk between NFS/PVT interface through manual/mechanical understory removal and development of a community protection plan (CPP) [see following link for possible equipment to develop fuel breaks in specific areas: http://www.tushogg.com/index_4800.cfm]</p>	<p>Patrick/Ted to identify feasibility of a fuel break in the southern portion of the AA. Patrick to review expanding Bear Pen Rx Burn boundaries using Kieseek Creek as break. Patrick to review CPP potential</p>

* Potential Restoration Opportunity