



FACT SHEET

Nantahala and Pisgah National Forests

Overview

The Nantahala and Pisgah National Forests are two of four national forests in North Carolina that are managed by the USDA Forest Service. The two national forests are found in western North Carolina and encompass more than 1 million acres. Together, they are among the most visited national forests in the nation.

The forest communities range from dry yellow pines to a variety of moist cove and mountain oak forests, to high-elevation northern hardwoods and spruce-fir forests. Almost 1,900 types of plants, including nearly 130 types of trees, and more than 300 species of vertebrate animals are found within the forests.

Both forests provide an abundance of clean air and water, scenic beauty, recreational opportunities, timber, wildlife habitats including old growth forests, and other goods and services. National forest visitors may enjoy a wide variety of recreational activities from whitewater rafting to camping and picnicking. With hundreds of trail miles, opportunities exist for hikers, mountain bikers, horseback riders and off-highway vehicle riders.

The diversity of plant and wildlife species includes species found nowhere else in the world. High quality timber adds to the nations' supply of wood products while medicinal, edible and commercial plants and shrubs are of economic value to local communities.

Nantahala National Forest

The Nantahala National Forest lies in the mountain and valleys of southwestern North Carolina. The largest of North Carolina's four national forests, the Nantahala encompasses approximately 532,000 acres.

The Forest is divided into three ranger districts: Cheoah based in Robbinsville, N.C.; Tusquitee in Murphy, N.C.; and the Nantahala in Franklin, N.C. All district names come from the Cherokee language. "Nantahala" is a Cherokee word meaning "land of the noon day sun," a fitting name for the Nantahala Gorge, where the sun only reaches to the valley floor at midday.

The Nantahala National Forest was established in 1920 under authority of the 1911 Weeks Act. This act provided authority to acquire lands for national forests to protect watersheds, to provide timber and to regulate the flow of navigable streams.

The many notable places within the boundaries of Nantahala National Forest include:

- Three designated wilderness areas: Ellicott Rock; Southern Nantahala; and Joyce Kilmer/Slickrock
- Mountain Water Scenic Byway
- Wayhutta Off-Highway Vehicle Area
- Two wild and scenic rivers: Chattooga; Horsepasture

- Numerous waterfalls including Dry Falls, Bridal Veil Falls, Cullasaja Falls and Whitewater Falls.
- Four shooting ranges: Dirty John; Panther Top; Moss Knob; and Atoah
- Two experimental forests: Coweeta Hydrologic Laboratory; Blue Valley Experimental Forest
- Approximately 87.9 miles of the Appalachian Trail

Pisgah National Forest

Comprised of more than 512,000 acres, the Pisgah National Forest is a land of mile-high peaks, cascading waterfalls and heavily forested slopes.

The Pisgah, Grandfather, and Appalachian Ranger Districts are based in Pisgah Forest, Nebo, and Mars Hill, N.C. respectively. These district names follow the names of nearby geographic features: Mt. Pisgah, Grandfather Mountain, and the Southern Appalachian Mountains.

The Pisgah National Forest was established in 1916. It is home of the first tract of land purchased under the Weeks Act of 1911 which led to the creation of the national forests in the eastern United States. It is also home of the first school of forestry in the United States, now preserved at the Cradle of Forestry in America historic site. In addition, the national forest boasts two of the first designated wilderness areas in the East.

In addition to the Cradle of Forestry in America, notable places within the boundaries of Pisgah National Forest include:

- Three designated wilderness areas: Shining Rock; Middle Prong; and Linville Gorge
- Forest Heritage Scenic Byway
- Brown Mountain Off-Highway Vehicle Area
- Waterfalls such as Looking Glass Falls and Linville Falls
- Wilson Creek National Wild & Scenic River
- Bent Creek Experimental Forest
- Scenic areas such as Roan Mountain and Max Patch
- Approximately 151.7 miles of the Appalachian Trail

For More Information

For more information about the Nantahala and Pisgah National Forests, visit www.fs.usda.gov/nfsnc.

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