

Francis Marion NF Plan Revision  
Meeting Report  
11/15/2012

Public Meetings of 10/25/2012 and 11/15/2012

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**Introduction and Meeting Objectives**

The USDA Forest Service staff in South Carolina is revising the forest plan for the Francis Marion National Forest. A combination of supervisor's office staff and district level staff has been organized to begin the assessment, which is the first phase of the planning process. The team understands that public participation is crucial for a successful planning process, therefore, a series of public meetings were held to determine who may be interested in participating in the process, how they prefer to participate, and what topics they prefer to discuss. This report is a summary of the notes from the meetings of October 25 and November 15, 2012. A total of approximately 25 persons attended the meetings and provided important information.

**Meeting Design**

The core team chose to use a meeting design using the world café model. This type of meeting allows some discussion as a full group while also enhancing participation in small groups. For these meetings, four round tables were distributed around the meeting room with different questions addressed at each table. Meeting participants rotated among the tables every 20 minutes. Notes from the full group discussion and a summary from each small group discussion follows.

**Summary Notes from the Plenary Session**

Following some meeting logistics, Mary Morrison (Plan Revision Team Leader) presented a powerpoint that outlined information such as: what is the forest plan; that plans are similar to county zoning; that the current 1996 plan addressed recovery of Hurricane Hugo (1989); and to begin assessing the need to change the plan in light of changes since 1996 and the likely future challenges. After this presentation, stakeholders were divided into small groups and they began rotating among the four tables. Summaries of small group discussions follow.

Table 1 Summary Comments  
Working Together  
Mary Morrison; John Cleeves; Amy Fore

This small group discussion focused on who might be interested in participating in the plan revision process and what are the outreach opportunities.

Potential Partnerships

There was much discussion about the opportunities for new partnerships throughout the process. Within the area of longleaf restoration and other ecological considerations, a new group called the Sewee Longleaf Conservation Cooperative has been formed. This group is chaired by the Nature Conservancy and provides a forum for communication and discussion among private and public landowners for restoration and other ecological goals.

The SC Forestry Commission, through Russell Hubright, is providing a clearinghouse of information that would aid in reaching potentially interested parties in the plan revision process. Another key consideration is needing to identify ongoing efforts to avoid duplication of efforts and sharing resources.

For those interested in nature based tourism and recreation opportunities, a few potential partnerships were highlighted. For example, one is the Sewee to Santee Community Development Corporation. Another example is the SC Nature based Tourism Association. Karen and Steve Livingston are potential contacts for organizing interests in nature-based activities.

Ongoing Planning Efforts

Discussions brought forward a few ongoing planning efforts where working together could produce some synergistic effects. One example is the Charleston County Greenbelt effort that could affect portions of the Francis Marion National Forests. County and town meetings were also identified as planning efforts needing close coordination, along with Community Wildfire Protection Planning. Events were discussed such as: the Charleston Greenfair, Sewee Wildlife Expo, Earthday events, and others.

Agencies, Organizations, and Individuals

Various organizations and agencies were cited during the small group discussions. These are documented in the process record meeting notes. Examples include the City of Charleston, the Historical Society of McClellanville, SC Department of Natural Resources and others.

Increasing Outreach

There was some discussion about how to reach more people to come to meetings. One example was to send information to partners, who in turn would send email blasts from their listserves. However, there were several responses to be targeted in the approach to public participation.

Meeting Design

Many of the stakeholders commented that the small group meeting design encouraged discussion and listening, which in turn built energy throughout the sessions. However, there were some individuals who preferred a traditional “hearing” style meeting.

Table 2 Summary of Notes  
Special Lands and Waters  
Robin Mackie, Mark Danaher, Gary Peters

During this small group session, stakeholders were asked what lands and waters are important to them and why. The notes from this session are summarized below.

Special Places: natural features on the forest

Stakeholders identified many places, more than 60 responses are catalogued in the process record. A few examples include the following: Wambaw Creek, Guilliard Lake, Cedar Hill Islands, Waterhorn, and Hellhole Wilderness.

Uniqueness: a primary reason for the importance of the forest

Stakeholders commented that many of the natural features on the forest are important because they are unique in a local and regional context. One example is the carolina bay, which is a pond depression that is symmetrically elliptical in shape and support a wide diversity of plants. Another example is the open pine savanna, where unique plant communities may be found. A favorite plant often cited was the pitcher plant. As one stakeholder said: “The forest is a treasure of plants, species that grow here and nowhere else.”

Nature-based experiences

Another reason for the importance of places on the forest was providing the opportunity for nature based experiences. Some of the experiences cited were: hearing a variety of birds, silence of the deep woods, seeing unique plants, hunting game species, biking through the forest.

Recreation Facilities

Many of the nature-based experiences were coupled with the supporting recreational facilities that are on the forest. Some examples cited were: the Wambaw Cycle Trail, Sewee Indian Ruins and others.

Table 3 Summary Notes  
What are the Greatest Challenges and Opportunities for the national forest  
Jay Purnell and Allan Hepworth

Stakeholders were asked what they perceived as the biggest challenges facing the Francis Marion National Forest in the near future. A summary of responses follow.

Urban interface and increasing use and pressure on the forest

Stakeholders commented that the increasing pressure of development adjacent to the forest is hampering the ability to accomplish prescribed burns and that there is an opportunity to create a model for using prescribed fire in the urban interface before the interface grows even more. Support from local communities is important. Others cited the increasing human impacts and conflicts between user groups. There were concerns that public use of the forest should not compromise its health and beauty.

Maintenance of infrastructure

There were numerous concerns and opportunities regarding trails; such as maintaining trails in good condition; providing potable water along some of the longer trails; connecting NF trails and facilities with the East Coast Greenway Trail; balancing trail systems with sensitive habitat systems; and coordinating trail uses between different users: ATV, horse, hikers, mountain bikes. Other concerns included the road system maintenance, recreation facilities and signage.

Partnerships and Coordination

Stakeholders discussed the need for closer coordination among the agencies, and different groups interested in the forest. For example the East Coast Greenways was cited as an effort where close coordination upfront could improve future outcomes. Others cited support for longleaf pine restoration that partners can provide.

Conflicting uses

Some individuals were concerned about hunting activities conflicting with other recreational uses as follows: that hunters concentrated in some areas of the forest, such as Swamp Road near Ion Swamp Trail; concern of an adjacent property owner that they not get shot by hunters; Others cited opportunities to eliminate hunting with dogs.

Table 4 Summary of Notes  
Your Free Time  
Robbin Cooper and Joe Robles

Stakeholders were asked to complete the following phrases:

The forest is the only place I can go to....

My favorite places to recreate on the forest are....

I can go to these places because.....

If I could take one photo of the forest it would be....

My visits could be better if.....

More than 90 responses are catalogued in the process record. Stakeholder interaction with the forest environment appears to improve their quality of life, health and well-being. Examples of some of the responses are cited below.

The forest is the only place I can go to:

Hear silence, get away from congestion

To see a natural spring

Ride trails on a mountain bike

Learn about the ecosystem

Place to be away from people

My favorite places to recreate on the forest are:

Wambaw Ck, Awendaw Ck, Sewee Indian ruins, I'on swamp trail

Open long leaf pine savannah growing season grasses, seeing pitcher plants

I go to these places because:

Go to recenter, kayak and bike

To escape-like being in a natural area near urban center

Like to see places that look like they might have looked before European settlement

Like to kayak, hike, see nature, endangered species, and birding

If I could take one photo of the forest it would be:

See wildlife in remote places

Picture of ivory billed woodpecker, Carolina parakeet

From honey hill Tower and pics of swallow tailed kites

Views from a tower (birding, etc.)

Long leaf with diverse understory (40 species/square meter)

Bottomland hardwood forest on Cedar Hill Island among Cypress

My visits could be better if:

Trouble finding where a trail starts and when its open

Directions are vague and hard to find. Can't mapquest trails...provide coordinates

## Emerging Themes

1. Sharing resources with partners and integrating into other planning efforts for efficiency is important to stakeholders. One example is the Sewee Longleaf Conservation Cooperative, currently under the leadership of the The Nature Conservancy, who is starting a landscape scale planning process for longleaf restoration. Another example is the planning for the East Coast Greenways project. Increasing coordination should decrease time and costs for planning and improve future outcomes.
2. Outreach should include presenting and discussing information at stakeholder sponsored meetings rather than relying solely on stakeholders to attend FS sponsored meetings. Partners can share information through their networks if they are provided information in a timely manner. This includes local community meetings, such as, city councils, churches, and schools. The local underserved community or minorities may not know that they are stakeholders in national forest management and outreach to them in their own supporting environments could increase their participation in forest-wide planning.
3. Many of the nature features on the forest are unique in the local and regional context. Dozens of places have been identified with special features that are unique to the national forest. Nature based experiences and the supporting recreational facilities are important for stakeholders.
4. Stakeholder interaction with the forest environment appears to improve their quality of life, health and well-being. Stakeholders cited important aspects of improving their livelihood, such as getting away from congestion (reducing stress), silence, exercising, and learning about the environment.
5. Among the major challenges are: the management of the wildland urban interface zone and, specifically, the restrictions on prescribed fire to maintain or restore the fire-adapted ecosystems; the maintenance of infrastructure-specifically trails and roads; the invasion of non-native species, such as the degradation of ecosystems caused by feral hogs; and more challenges as listed in the responses.