



Southern Region
Office of Communication
sm.fs.r8oc@usda.gov

Forest Service completes objection reviews for Nantahala and Pisgah forest plan

ASHEVILLE, N.C. — Jan. 19, 2023 – The USDA Forest Service issued a response on Thursday to objection issues raised for the revised Nantahala and Pisgah forest plan.

The response was developed after a review of the written objections and virtual resolution meetings with Forest Service officials and objectors, along with further review by an independent team of forest planning specialists.

“I am humbled by the number of people interested in their local forests, and I appreciate everyone’s participation in the process. They clarified issues and provided ideas to improve the final plan,” said reviewing officer, Deputy Regional Forester Rick Lint.

The objection review process ensures the revised final plan meets current law, regulation and policy. It also considers changes that improve the analysis and decision.

“The Forests’ planning team did an incredible job with the plan, as you will see in the responses to the objections,” added Lint. “We recognize that healthy forests and communities are interdependent; it’s one of our Forest Service values. We take public engagement seriously; we modified the plan based on what we heard at the objection meetings.”

For example, in the Big Ivy/Craggy Mountain area, the Forests added acres to the special interest area, as suggested by some objectors.

Objection issues covered nearly every topic of the revision, including the amount of land identified for timber harvest; recommended wilderness and eligible wild and scenic rivers; old growth management, sustainable recreation, state natural heritage areas, roads; threatened and endangered species, species of conservation concern protections, invasive species, ecological modeling; and use of best available scientific information.

Final instructions and clarifications were shared with the Forests’ staff and objectors following the independent review by the national team. The written responses are the final decision by the U.S. Department of Agriculture on the objections.

The Forests complied with all instructions, most of which focused on providing clarifications or additional information.

Summary of changes:

- **Wild and Scenic Rivers:** Added a newly eligible Wild and Scenic River segment for the North Fork French Broad River, with a recreational classification. Designation as a wild and scenic river is our nation's strongest form of protection for free-flowing rivers and streams.
- **Special Designations:** Voluntarily expanded the amount of Special Interest Area management in the Big Ivy/Craggy Mountain and Shope Creek areas, recognizing the ecological, scenic and recreational value of the land. The plan expands the area to more than 12,200 acres overall, an increase of about 800 acres.
- **Species protections:** Clarified how the plan protects species of conservation concern and the recovery of federally listed species.
- **Sustainable Recreation:** Clarified aspects of management for user-created trails, updated guidance on managing climbing routes through unique habitats, and added management approaches related to visitor management at equestrian campgrounds, all based on input from objectors.
- **Updated process documentation** on ecological modeling, species analyses and Wild and Scenic Rivers evaluations.

Given the high volume of issues, as each objection response was finalized, the forest began implementing instructions after the review team completed their work on each issue.

The new revised plan will replace the current plan, which was created in 1987 and has not been changed significantly since 1994. The new plan is expected to be released by the end of the month.

The resolution response is posted to the website for the National Forests in North Carolina at www.fs.usda.gov/goto/nfsnc/nprevision

The Nantahala and Pisgah National Forests are part of the Southern Region of the U.S. Forest Service. The region spans 13 states and Puerto Rico. It consists of 14 national forest units and two special units. National Forests in the Southern Region are managed to strike a balance between resource development and protecting wild places for recreation and wildlife.