

****Disclaimer:** The specific descriptions, goals, desired conditions, and objectives only apply to the National Forest System Lands within the Shining Rock Geographic Area. However, nearby communities and surrounding lands are considered and used as context. ******

North Slope Geographic Area

Updated: May 19, 2017

Description of area

The North Slope Geographic Area is characterized by remote landscapes and high elevation mountains (3,000 – 6,000 feet), including Mt. Pisgah, Richland Balsam, Mt. Hardy, and Cold Mountain.

Numerous, swift-moving streams work their way down the rugged slopes to the Little East Fork and the East and West Forks of the Pigeon Rivers. Countless waterfalls decorate the landscape and tiny branches of streams rise more than 5,000 feet above sea level. These cold mountain streams provide high-quality backcountry fishing opportunities, including the native brook trout.

The Blue Ridge Parkway and Forest Heritage Scenic Byway surround the remote areas of the region and bring many visitors to enjoy the diverse forests. This geographic area is entirely within the Pisgah Ranger District. Communities within the area include Canton, Candler, and Waynesville. These communities and residents of Haywood and Buncombe counties rely on the 37,913 acres of National Forest System lands in this geographic area (90,551 total acres) for many ecosystem services, such as clean water and recreation.

Management areas inside the North Slope Geographic Area include:

- Scenic Byway Corridors (Blue Ridge Parkway and Forest Heritage National Scenic Byway)
- Shining Rock and Middle Prong Wilderness Areas
- Inventoried Roadless Area
- Fork Ridge-Mount Hardy and Mount Pisgah botanical areas
- East Fork Pigeon River, portions of which is an eligible Wild and Scenic River; and West Fork of Pigeon River, portions of which are newly eligible Wild and Scenic Rivers

Landmarks within the geographic area that are not managed by the Forest Service include:

- a) Blue Ridge National Parkway (National Park Service)

Connecting people to the land

The North Slope Geographic Area was historically a center for logging in North Carolina. When Carl Schenck's Biltmore School of Forestry was forced to vacate its premises on the Vanderbilt's Biltmore Estate near Asheville in 1910, it briefly relocated to the village of Sunburst, a logging community in this geographic area. The Sunburst site is now a developed camping area maintained by the Forest Service.

Almost two thirds of North Slope Geographic Area is in congressionally designated wilderness and a roadless areas, providing remote settings, challenge and reliance on primitive skills, and opportunities for solitude. The area provides many miles of hiking trails for day-hiking and backpacking, as well as some opportunities for horseback riding. Although much of the area is managed to provide opportunities for solitude, Shining Rock Wilderness experiences high levels of visitation. Other popular activities include backcountry fishing in the headwaters of the Pigeon River and tributaries. Deer, turkey,

grouse, and bear hunting occurs across the geographic area, but is popular in areas such as Lickstone Ridge and Cold Mountain.

The largely undeveloped backdrop of the geographic area surrounds the Forest Heritage Scenic Byway (U.S. 276 and U.S. 215) and the Blue Ridge Parkway, both of which provide access to these remote areas. These scenic routes also bring visitors to the forest for sightseeing and camping opportunities. The area has experienced significant improvements in scenic visibility with reduced air pollution in the region. Air quality is likely to continue to improve toward the goal of natural background visibility by 2064. Tourism, health care, and manufacturing are all major economic drivers for the local communities. National Forest System lands provide a wide variety of opportunities for nature-based recreation in support of tourism and the local economy.

Enhancing and restoring resiliency

The topography of North Slope supports a unique mix of forest habitats, which provides opportunity for specific restoration and wildlife goals. Due to high elevation peaks, the region hosts a high concentration of spruce fir ecosystems, which provide an opportunity to maintain and enhance this forest type through creating small gaps and planting red spruce. The high elevations are also home to red oak and northern hardwood forests. These with rich cove and mesic oak forests in mid elevation areas provide opportunities for hardwood forest restoration. Specifically, opportunities exist to increase diversity in the rich cove and mesic oak forest in the Sunburst area.

Rare habitats in the area such as heath balds, Carolina hemlock forests, beech gaps, boulderfields, and cranberry bogs, provide a home for rare plants and animals. Federally endangered rock gnome lichen is abundant in the upper headwaters and surrounding forests of Flat Laurel Creek.

Clean and abundant water

The Pigeon River provides an industrial water source to the paper manufacturing industry in Canton. Approximately 140 miles of creeks and rivers run through the geographic area on National Forest System lands.

Goals

The following goals contribute to identification of management priorities in the North Slope Geographic Area. These goals highlight key opportunities and values that will guide Forest Service management and reflect values the Forest Service has heard from the public. These goals are not inclusive of all activities that will occur within the geographic area, and do not represent all the values that are present.

Enhancing and restoring resiliency

- a) Restore diverse forest structure and age classes in areas outside of designated wilderness areas to improve forest resilience and to ensure connectivity of a range of suitable wildlife habitat over the long term across the geographic area.
- b) Maintain resilient habitat conditions, particularly in spruce-fir and northern hardwood forests for the endangered Carolina northern flying squirrel and rock gnome lichen

Connecting people to the land

- a) Evaluate how to best protect wilderness values, mitigate impacts from high visitation, and implement appropriate actions to maintain wilderness character for solitude, naturalness, and primitive and unconfined recreation.
- b) Improving game and non-game wildlife habitat in the Lickstone Ridge area for hunting and wildlife viewing.

Providing clean and abundant water

- a) Maintain or expand the range of brook trout in the headwaters of the Pigeon River through population augmentation or reintroduction, or reconnecting fragmented populations through improved aquatic organism passage at road and trail stream crossings.
- b) Maintain healthy populations of hellbenders in East Fork and West Fork Pigeon River.

Opportunities to Partner with Others

- b) Partner with organizations and volunteers to support and enhance wilderness values and experiences.
- c) Work with local governments to improve signage and information for all wilderness visitors.