

Identification of Possible Special Interest Areas

As part of the management area mapping process, the Forest Service Interdisciplinary Team (IDT) evaluated both existing Special Interest Areas (SIAs), identified in the 1986 Forest Plan, as well as proposed Special Interest Areas as identified by state partners and public comments. Most of the currently designated SIAs will be carried forward in the revised Forest Plan, with a few exceptions that have been explained below.

The intent with identifying mapped SIAs in the management area framework is to recognize the most exceptional and unique areas of the forest as well as those areas that require specific management area direction for maintaining or protecting the unique attributes of the area. Unique attributes may be botanical, geological, historical, paleontological, recreational, scenic, or zoological but should be attributes that remain relatively persistent at the site over time.

In 2014, the State Natural Heritage Program submitted a comment letter asking the Forest Service to consider 36 new areas as Special Interest Areas in the revised Plan. NCNHP recognized that some of these areas may also be suitable for designation as other management areas besides SIAs, as long as the Forest Plan recognizes and protects their important natural features. The 36 new areas submitted by the state were those NHNA ranked as “Exceptional” and contain some of the best examples of imperiled species and habitats on the forest. The State specifically asked the Forest Service to consider Exceptional areas as the highest priority for Special Interest Area designation.

The IDT considered NCNHP’s exceptionally ranked Natural Heritage Natural Areas (NHNAs) that were presented to the Forest Service in 2014, as well as additional Exceptional sites that were included in 2017 data provided to the Forest Service. For those Exceptional sites that do not already fall within a Wilderness, Wilderness Study Area, Research Natural Area, or the Roan Mountain management area, we considered whether the area needed specific management direction in the Forest Plan for maintaining or protecting the unique attributes of the area. Some Exceptional areas or portions of areas are not being advanced as Special Interest Areas because there are other places on the Forests that better represent high quality ecological communities. While not all state-recognized NHNAs will be included in the Forest Plan as SIAs, there will be new forestwide plan direction to consider data provided by the State Natural Heritage Program during project development. Additionally, forestwide plan direction will protect rare species and habitats across all management areas.

In addition to considering the State Natural Heritage Program’s data, the IDT also considered proposals for specific areas brought forward by the public for Special Interest Area consideration. Big Ivy, Bluff Mountain, Panthertown Valley, and Nantahala Gorge are areas being proposed as Special Interest Areas because of their scenic, recreational, botanical, and zoological attributes.

The Forest is currently in discussions with the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians to identify places on the Forests that will receive SIA designation because they are important to Tribal cultural identity; history, culture, beliefs, and traditions. Exact locations are being determined. These areas will likely include the Judaculla Tribal Landscape (Pisgah Ledge geographic area and Highland Domes geographic area), Cowee Tribal Landscape (Great Balsam geographic area), and Santeetlah Tribal Landscape (Unicoi Mountains geographic area).

Changes to Current SIAs

The following SIAs are designated in the current Forest Plan (1995 Amendment) and are proposed to be allocated to other management areas, such as Interface, Matrix or Backcountry, under the revised plan because the conditions under which they were designated are no longer present on the ground.

- Scarlet Oak – This is a 140-acre site on the Pisgah Ranger District that was designated because of the good quality, relatively undisturbed scarlet oak forest. The scarlet oak is no longer the predominant forest type in this area, and the site is not representative of quality scarlet oak. There are other high quality chestnut oak forests in other SIAs, Wilderness, or Wilderness Study Areas on the Forests.
- Wildes Cove – This nine-acre site was designated because of an exceptional Isotria population; however, the Isotria population is no longer present at this location.
- North Fork Ivy Creek – This is a 15-acre site that was designated for its old growth cove forest. North Fork Ivy Creek was logged in 1988, which was indicated in the 1987 plan. Additionally, this area will fall within the expanded Big Ivy SIA.

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Table 1 includes all SIAs that are currently proposed for designation in the revised Forest Plan.

Area	Ranger District	Existing or New	MA	Acres	Unique Attributes
Big Bald Mountain	Appalachian	Existing	AT	132	Geological and botanical
Big Laurel Creek	Appalachian	Existing	SIA	595	Scenic and botanical
Black Mountains	Appalachian	Existing	RNA &SIA	3892	Botanical and zoological
Craggy Mountains/Big Ivy	Appalachian	Existing, Expanded	WSA, SIA	10,916	Scenic, botanical and zoological
Paint Rock	Appalachian	Existing	SIA	96	Geological and botanical
Roan Mountain Massif	Appalachian	Existing	Roan	7900	Botanical and zoological
Walker Cove	Appalachian	Existing	RNA &SIA	53	Botanical
Joyce Kilmer Wilderness Area	Cheoah	Existing	Wilderness	3840	Botanical
Santeetlah Bluffs/Wright Cove	Cheoah	Existing	SIA	365	Botanical
Johns Creek	Grandfather	Existing	SIA	17	Botanical
Linville Gorge	Grandfather	Existing	Wilderness	10975	Geological and botanical
Bonas Defeat Gorge	Nantahala	Existing	SIA	325	Geological and Scenic
Bryson Branch	Nantahala	Existing	SIA	76	Botanical
Camp Branch Falls	Nantahala	Existing	SIA	2	Botanical
Cole Mountain/Shortoff Mtn	Nantahala	Existing	SIA	56	Botanical
Cullasaja Gorge	Nantahala	Existing	SIA	2852	Botanical and geological
Ellicott Rock-Chattooga River Gorge	Nantahala	Existing	Wilderness & WSR	2074	Botanical and zoological
Kelsey Tract	Nantahala	Existing	SIA	256	Botanical and zoological
Nantahala Gorge Blowing Springs	Nantahala	Existing	SIA	190	Zoological, botanical, and geological
Nantahala River Bogs	Nantahala	Existing	SIA	61	Botanical and zoological
Piney Knob Fork	Nantahala	Existing	SIA	33	Botanical
Runaway Knob	Nantahala	Existing	SIA	140	Botanical
Scaly Mountain and Catstairs	Nantahala	Existing	SIA	133	Botanical
Slick Rock	Nantahala	Existing	SIA	11	Botanical
Standing Indian	Nantahala	Existing	Wilderness &AT	2124	Botanical

Area	Ranger District	Existing or New	MA	Acres	Unique Attributes
Whiteside Mountain	Nantahala	Existing	SIA	220	Geological and scenic
Whitewater Falls	Nantahala	Existing	SIA	315	Scenic and botanical
Walking Fern Cove	Nantahala	Existing	SIA	25	Botanical
Dismal Falls	Pisgah	Existing	SIA	207	Botanical and scenic
Fork Ridge/Mount Hardy	Pisgah	Existing	Wilderness	623	Botanical
John Rock	Pisgah	Existing	SIA	435	Scenic
Looking Glass Rock	Pisgah	Existing	SIA	1623	Scenic and geological
Mount Pisgah	Pisgah	Existing	SIA	486	Botanical
Pink Bed bogs	Pisgah	Existing, Expanded	Cradle	1322	Botanical
Buck Creek Serpentine Barrens	Tusquitee	Existing	SIA	596	Botanical and geological
Riley Knob/ Chunky Gal Mountain	Tusquitee	Existing	SIA	226	Botanical
White Oak Stamp	Tusquitee	Existing	SIA	583	Botanical
Cheoah Bald	Cheoah	New	SIA	1922	Botanical and zoological
Old Roughy	Cheoah	New	SIA	245	Botanical
Dulany Bog	Nantahala	New	SIA	21	Botanical
Lower French Broad River	Appalachian	New	SIA	173	Rich aquatic biodiversity
Dix Creek/ Cold Mtn	Pisgah	New	SIA	180	Botanical
Alarka Laurel	Nantahala	New	SIA	645	Botanical and cultural
Blackrock Mtn/Granite City	Nantahala	New	SIA	635	Geological and botanical
Cedar Cliff/The Pinnacle	Nantahala	New	SIA	640	Botanical
Doubletop Mtn/Cliff Mtn	Nantahala	New	SIA	246	Botanical
Panthertown Valley	Nantahala	New	SIA	2412	Recreation and botanical
Silver Run Preserve/Sassafras Mtn	Nantahala	New	SIA	1687	Botanical
The Fodderstacks	Nantahala	New	SIA	223	Geological and botanical
Bald Mtn	Grandfather	New	SIA	188	Botanical
Linville Dolomite	Grandfather	New	SIA	153	Geological

Area	Ranger District	Existing or New	MA	Acres	Unique Attributes
Woods Mtn - Singecat Ridge	Grandfather	New	SIA	212	Botanical
Lovers Leap/Stackhouse Slopes	Appalachian	New	SIA	897	Botanical
Spring Creek Gorge	Appalachian	New	SIA	729	Botanical
Die Bend Crowder Bluff	Tusquitee	New	SIA	51	Botanical and zoological
Bluff Mtn	Appalachian	New	SIA	910	Scenic and botanical
Nantahala Gorge	Nantahala	New	SIA	3525	Recreational
Additional areas to be identified by Federally Recognized Tribes	Multiple	New	SIA		Cultural, to be mapped after discussion with Tribes

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