

This developing plan content is under construction and is being shared as a snapshot of thinking. Additional changes based on Forest Service and public input are expected.

Chapter 4: Geographic Areas

Last updated: May 22, 2017

***A special note for this pre-draft May 2017 version – Given that the latest thinking on this chapter is being shared as a separate chapter, please keep in mind that this geographic area chapter does not stand alone. The plan direction in this chapter builds on the existing content on all of the Forestwide sections, and the direction in the Management Area chapter.*

Places matter. While the forestwide section of the plan provides direction that is consistently applied across the forest, there are also some differences across the 1.2 million acres of the Forests. By separating the Forests into distinct landscapes, the Forest Plan will recognize the opportunities for restoration and sustainable recreation opportunities, connections to nearby communities, and opportunities for partnerships with the public, other organizations, and governments in each part of the forest. These distinct landscapes are known as geographic areas, and they allow the plan to describe each part of the Forests as it relates to our themes – restoration and resiliency, providing clean and abundant water, and connecting people to the land. Each geographic area also has goals identified that will serve as emphases for management during plan implementation.

Geographic areas contain management areas within them. They work in combination with forestwide direction (Chapter 2) and management area direction (Chapter 3) to provide guidance during plan implementation.

What are the geographic areas on the Nantahala and Pisgah Forests?

There are 12 geographic areas on the Nantahala and Pisgah National Forests. They cross Ranger District and county boundaries, as they are divided by landscape features. (See below for more information on how the area lines were drawn). From east to west they are:

Eastern Escarpment

Brown Mountains

Black Mountains

Pisgah Ledge

North Slope

Highland Domes

Great Balsam

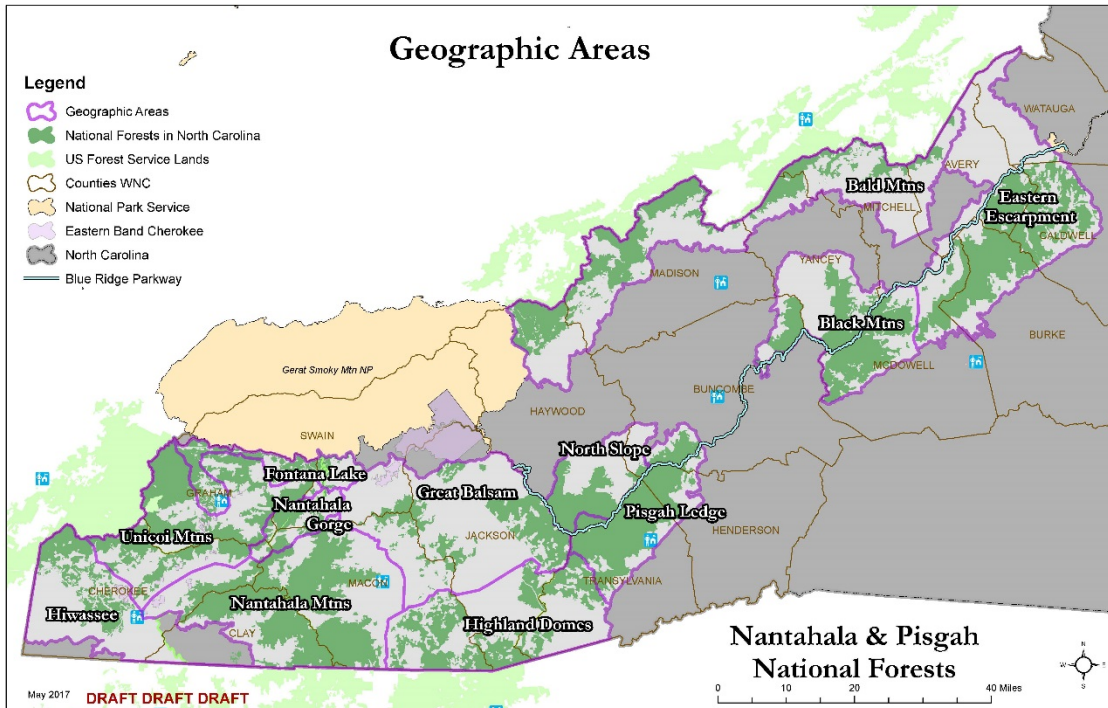
Nantahala Mountains

Nantahala Gorge

Hiwassee

Fontana Lake

Unicoi Mountains



How were geographic areas determined?

These geographic areas were defined by landscape character and public use. First, boundaries were informed by landscape characteristics, including geologic features, topography, hydrology, and water features, as well as forest types and vegetation composition. The lines were then further refined by consideration of cultural and historical elements, recreational opportunities and experiences, and the consideration of local communities.

While the boundaries of the geographic areas extend beyond the lands managed by the Forest Service, the larger boundaries provide context for the Forests within the broader western North Carolina landscape. The plan direction will only apply to the management of National Forest System lands.

The entire Nantahala and Pisgah National Forests and all geographic areas include ancestral lands of federally recognized American Indian Tribes. As is true of all the geographic areas, there are Tribal community identities tied to their history and use of the land for thousands of years. Forest resources continue to be used for shelter, food, medicinal use, and ceremonial use within all geographical areas.

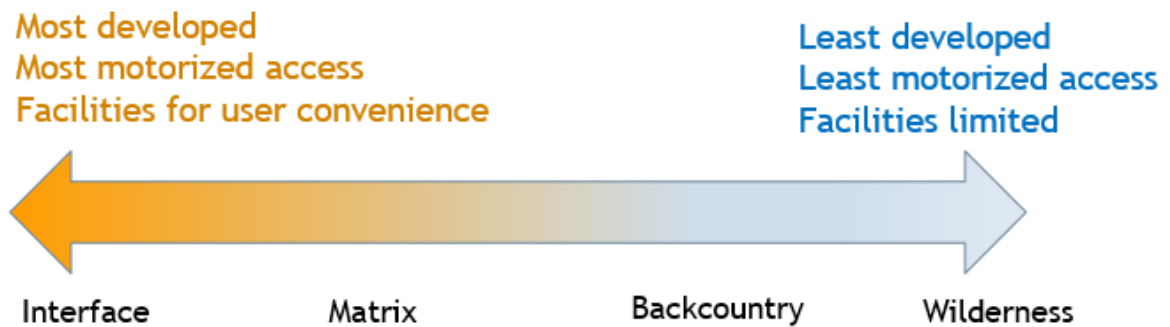
The Forest Service is using a diverse team of specialists, including those with local on-the-ground knowledge, to draft an initial summary of each geographic area. In addition to Forest Service professional knowledge, we are integrating information we have heard from thousands of public comments into the development of this chapter of the plan. These sections of the plan will be shared for public input, just like other initial plan building blocks have been.

How do geographic areas work with management areas?

Geographic areas describe specific areas of the Forests and the goals to accomplish forest objectives that are present in that area of the forest. Within each geographic area, land is allocated to different management areas such as Interface, Matrix, and Backcountry, as well as special designations. These

management areas repeat across geographic areas, much like residential, commercial, and industrial zones repeat across a city. Geographic areas themselves do not repeat, but represent the unique identity of specific areas of the Forests.

Geographic area and management areas work together to identify where activities will occur on the landscape. For example, management areas most clearly explain the recreation gradient across the forest.



Geographic area goals identify strategic recreation goals for particular locations. For example:

- Pisgah Ledge goal: With increased visitation within the U.S. Highway 276 corridor, emphasize management actions that sustain and enhance high quality recreation experiences, with a focus on visitor safety, improving access, and reducing impacts to natural resources.
- Fontana Lake goal: Continue to work with marina and mooring point special use permit holders to modernize and improve water-based recreation.

In the same way, the 25 resources topics depend on information from both management areas and geographic areas to identify where activities will occur.

What goes in a geographic area goal?

Geographic area goals are designed to be strategic to support future projects and activities without actually prescribing the precise activity that will take place. For example, you won't see any goals about opening X road, managing invasive species Y along roadside Z, or developing a trailhead or parking lot at location Q. Instead, you will see goals that identify a need for more access along seasonally needed routes, prioritize nonnative invasive species control measures in certain ecological communities, or emphasize mountain bike opportunity in a general location. These goals help focus the forestwide objectives of the Plan while still enabling future projects to make the best localized decision when the time is ripe.

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.