

## Nantahala and Pisgah National Forests Plan Revision



### Public Sessions Summary

**April 17, 2014 – Asheville, NC**

**July 10, 2014 – Asheville, NC**

Following publication of the Need for Change and the publication of the Notice of Intent to Revise the Forest Plan in March 2014, the National Forests in NC held two public meetings on key issues that were raised during the scoping period. Both meetings were well attended all-day sessions held at the Crowne Plaza Resort in Asheville, NC.

### April 17, 2014 Initial Inventory of Potential Additions to Wilderness Process

The 2012 planning rule directs forests to identify and evaluate lands that may be suitable for inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System (NWPS) and determine whether to recommend any such lands for wilderness designation. The first step of this process is to complete a reasonably broad and inclusive inventory of lands that may be suitable for inclusion in the NWPS.

Seventy-five public participants attended the April workshop to discuss the process and criteria for identifying areas in the initial inventory for potential additions to wilderness. Ruth Berner gave a PowerPoint presentation that provided information on our current designated wildernesses, the 2012 planning rule requirements, and the seven step process that the interdisciplinary team used to identify areas in the initial inventory.



Following the presentation, meeting participants were divided into small groups, ensuring a diversity of opinions on wilderness designation were represented at each table. Individuals were asked to select three words from a word list that they felt pertained to wilderness. The intent of this exercise was to get people engaged and recognize where there are similarities and differences with how people perceive wilderness. The small group discussions then focused on each of the seven process steps that were used to identify areas in the inventory. Following small group discussions, the public had the opportunity to provide area specific comments on the maps that were posted on walls around the room.

### Designated Areas

The afternoon of the April 17<sup>th</sup> meeting was focused on designated areas other than wilderness. These include special interest areas, research natural areas, experimental forests, Cradle of Forestry, as well as others. Heather Luczak gave a presentation that included information on designated areas in our current forest plan and an explanation of the proposed criteria that the Forest Service will be using to evaluate proposals for new designated areas in the revised forest plan.

Following the presentation, small group discussions were focused around the proposed criteria for evaluating designated areas. Forest-wide maps were provided for each small group and individuals were invited to identify places on the map that should be considered for designation in the revised forest plan, as well as existing designated areas that should be modified or reevaluated for designation.

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### **Scenery Inventory**

On the evening of April 17<sup>th</sup>, a drop-in session was held to provide information on the scenery management system and gather input on the initial scenery inventory. A self-view PowerPoint presentation was available to provide the background context for scenery management. Large scale maps were available for each ranger district with the initial scenery concern levels. Delce Dyer and Erik Crews were available to answer questions and provide additional information to interested individuals. Comment forms were provided and were accepted through mid-May.

Following the April 17<sup>th</sup> workshop, the PowerPoint presentations, inventory process steps, and inventory maps were posted on the forest's plan revision website. Additional opportunity to comment on the wilderness inventory process, designated areas, and scenery inventory was invited through May 15, 2014.

### **July 10, 2014 Wildlife Habitat; Ecosystem Integrity and Diversity; and Wild and Scenic Rivers**

The creation, quality, and amount of early successional wildlife was a substantial issue that was raised during the March and April scoping period. Additionally, the consideration of ecosystem integrity and diversity and how to establish these in the revised forest plan continues to be a topic of discussion. The July 10<sup>th</sup> meeting was held in order to be responsive to the public's interest in these topics. A poster presentation on wild and scenic rivers was available for question and comment.



One-hundred and twenty-four public participants attended the July 10<sup>th</sup> meeting. The morning session was focused on wildlife habitat diversity. Sheryl Bryan presented information on how the forest is using public comment and best available science to inform how the revised forest plan may address wildlife habitat creation. Following the presentation, participants were invited to identify specific areas on ranger district maps “that are important to you or that you think should be highlighted for specific management or species”.

The afternoon session on July 10<sup>th</sup> focused on ecosystem integrity and diversity. Ruth Berner provided background information on the historical context of ecosystem drivers and stressors in the southern Appalachians. Jason Rodrigue and Gary Kauffman presented a hypothetical watershed on the Nantahala and Pisgah NFs and discussed some tools that can be useful for evaluating ecosystem integrity. Some example management scenarios were presented and the public was then asked to share their suggestions for management opportunities that might address a range of public perspectives. This was a facilitated large group discussion and public comments were captured on flip-charts at the front of the room.

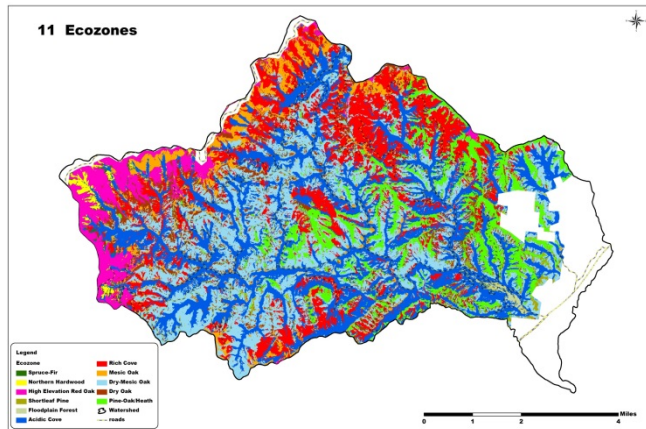
### **Next Steps**

Information collected at the April 17<sup>th</sup> public workshop and comments received on the wilderness inventory process will be used to refine the inventory of potential additions to wilderness. The revised inventory maps will be shared online and available at ranger district offices by early September. The plan revision interdisciplinary team will begin evaluation of areas identified in the inventory. Comments on the criteria for evaluating designated areas will be reviewed and the criteria will be updated and shared on the forest website. Proposals for designated areas will be evaluated using the designated area criteria.

The Forest Service Plan Revision team will be using the information gathered from public comments and meetings over the last year to develop a proposed forest plan, including a new management area framework. A series of five or six public meetings will be scheduled in October and November in the vicinity of the ranger districts. These meetings will present the proposed management area framework and some potential plan components for the different resource areas. Information on the evaluation of potential additions to wilderness will also be available.

**July 10, 2014 – Ecological integrity discussion**

On the afternoon of July 10<sup>th</sup>, a 27,000 acre hypothetical watershed was presented to discuss how different analysis tools can be used to inform management opportunities. The eleven ecozones of the Nantahala and Pisgah NFs were presented, as well as the potential natural vegetation model, LiDAR data, and Forest Service Veg data (FSVeg). These tools help to describe existing conditions on the forest including vegetation composition, height, age and structure. The questions below were posed to the group of participants and the list that follows was generated through public input.



Watershed		
Ecozone	Acres	Percent
Dry Oak	1465	5%
Rich Cove	4662	17%
Acidic Cove	7873	29%
Dry-Mesic Oak	7019	26%
Mesic Oak	1542	6%
HERO	1397	5%
Pine-Oak/Heath	2578	9%
Spruce-Fir	62	0.2%
Northern Hwd	194	1%
Shortleaf Pine	162	1%
Floodplain Forest	212	1%
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What are some other opportunities that have occurred to you during this presentation?

What activities might address the range of perspectives that we have heard throughout this plan revision?

- Restoring red spruce to high elevations – mixed conifer composition
- Encourage FS to think about how climate change effects high elevation communities and build climate change resiliency into planning
- Invasives occur in natural disturbances and recreation areas as well as in recently cut areas
- Focus early successional habitat creation near roads but also consider other areas away from roads.
- Consider aggregating patches
- Look at most departed ecosystems. Target management to all ecosystems not just economically viable ones.
- Consider watersheds at risk from acid deposition, and opportunities to treat with lime in these areas.
- Look at areas to remove artificial fish barriers
- Concern regarding relation to wildlife benefits – patches should be 20-50 acres – larger openings with dense stems.
- Rich coves- more prominent shortage of old growth, areas should be allowed to move towards old growth condition. It is questionable as to whether early successional habitat should be created in rich coves – precludes old growth development
- Hemlocks – how to manage in areas and account for the risk of invasives along roads. There needs to be proactive planning to avoid the spread of invasives.

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- In reducing rhododendron, has consideration been given to liming (look at studies from Bent Creek Exp. Forest)
- There is a danger when creating early successional habitat because disturbance and openings allow for increases in invasive plants. Plan for pre and post treatment of invasives.
- Don't lose sight of the small-scale low acreage habitats – wetlands, rock outcrops, high diversity areas.
- Encourage and protect opportunities for recreation- large and small patches of flowers and shrubs
- Non-native invasive species – inventory in areas where you can have the biggest impact. It is a 3-5 year commitment of treatment. FS needs more funding for treatment. There are direct impacts to wildlife such as birds that eat invasive plants (berries).
- Forest Service needs a final definition of early successional habitat.
- Use the best and most current science, particularly regarding climate change.