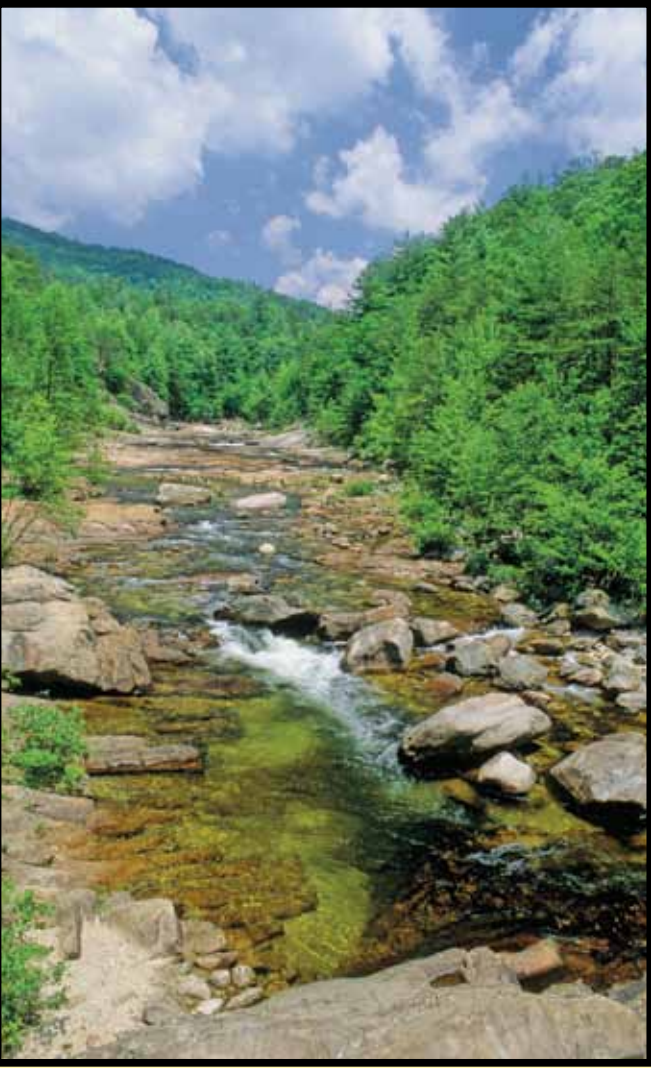
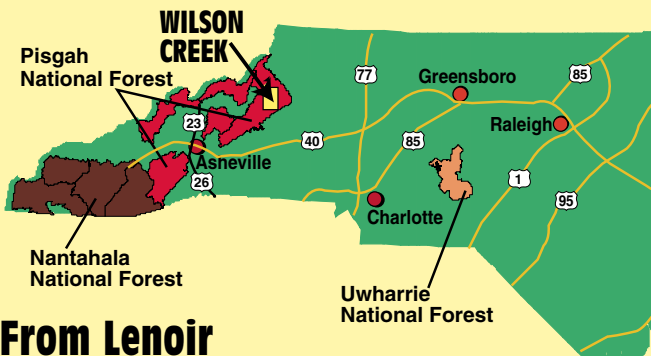


# Wilson Creek

National Wild and Scenic River  
Trail Guide  
Pisgah National Forest



North Carolina 2009  
**America's Great Outdoors**  
Forest Service  
United States Department of Agriculture



**From Lenoir**  
From NC 90 west to Collettesville. Turn left on Adako Road (SR 1337) just beyond school and grocery store. Go three miles to Mortimer Campground signs on right. Turn right and travel on SR 1328 to Wilson Creek area.

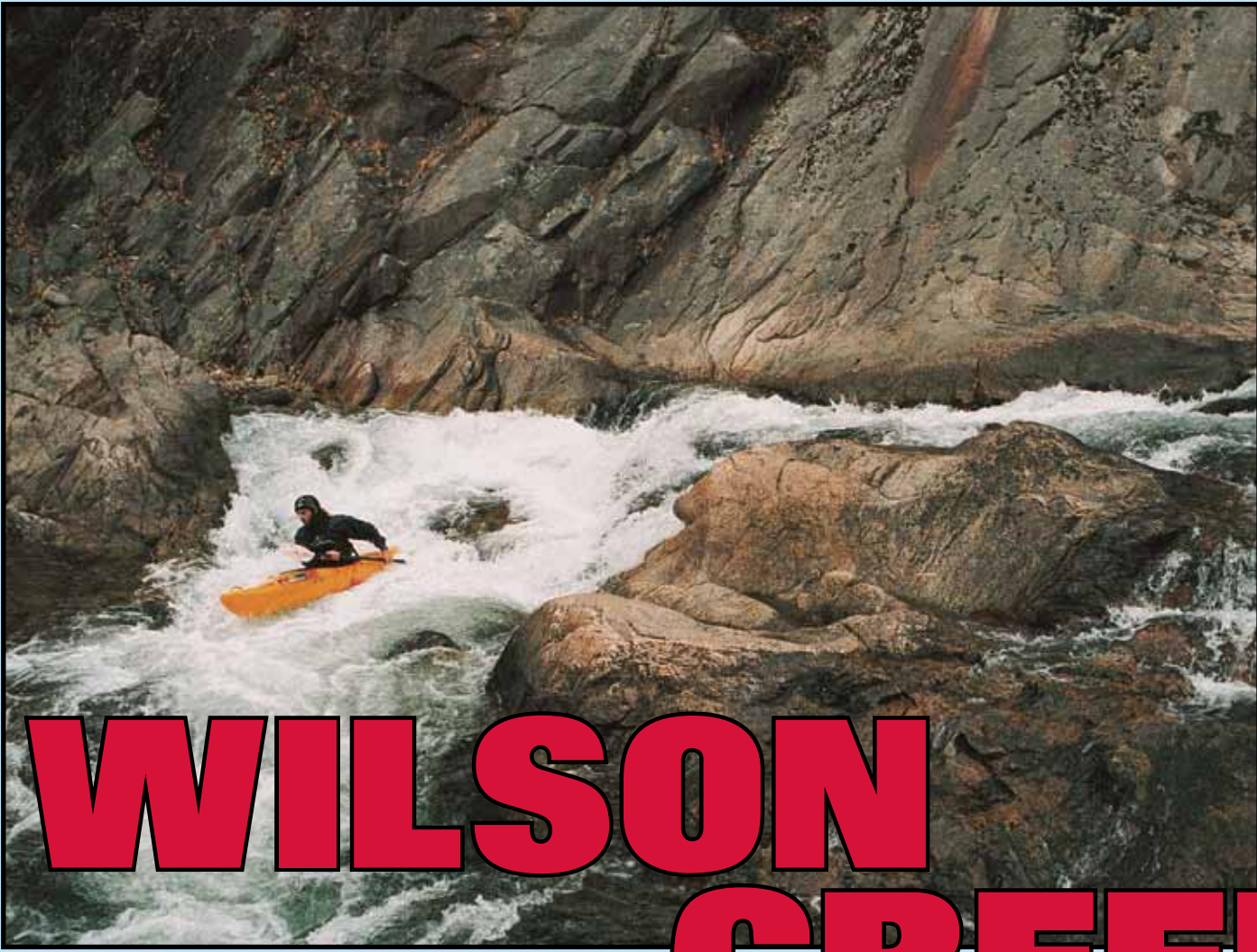
**From Morganton**  
Take NC 181 north about 11 miles toward Linville. Turn right on Brown Mountain Beach Road (SR 1405) at a small wooden church on right. Go 4.5 miles east to Mortimer Campground sign on left. Turn left and follow SR 1328 to Wilson Creek.

**From Asheville**  
Take I-40 East to Exit 103 (Nebo/Lake James). Follows same directions as above.

**For maps and Information**  
National Forest in North Carolina  
160A Zillicoa Street  
Asheville, NC 28801  
(828) 257-4200

**Grandfather Ranger District**  
109 East Lawing Drive  
Nebo, NC 28761  
(828) 652-2144

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A kayaker rides the Wilson Creek's Class II-IV+(V) white rapids that squeeze through narrow gorges. (Photo by Mark Bradshaw)

## THE PERFECT PLACE FOR OUTDOOR ADVENTURES

With fantastic vistas, ridges more than 4,000 feet high, whitewater rapids and trails that travel to spectacular waterfalls, Wilson Creek offers great adventures for hiking, scenic viewing, mountain biking, fishing, camping, horseback riding and backpacking.

## WILSON CREEK NAMED NATIONAL W&S RIVER

Back in the 1960s, people recognized that our nation's rivers were being dammed, dredged, diverted and degraded at an alarming rate. As a response, Congress created the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System in October 1968. Wild rivers are historically free-flowing, unpolluted and generally inaccessible except by trail. Scenic rivers may be accessible by roads, but they are largely undeveloped.

Because recreational rivers are readily accessible by roads, these rivers may have undergone impoundment and diversion or development may occur along shorelines.

Wilson Creek became North Carolina's newest wild and scenic river on Aug. 18, 2000. Beginning at at Grandfather Mountain, the creek flows for 23.3 miles to Johns River. Surrounded by Pisgah National Forest, the river flows through through the Southern Piedmont and Blue Ridge Mountains.

## GREAT RIVER FOR VARIETY OF RECREATION

Wilson Creek's extreme elevation span creates the perfect river for a variety of recreation. The river's 2.3-mile gorge is best known for its recreational values: wild-trout fishing, outstanding scenery and challenging whitewater. The Brown Mountain Beach Road parallels the lower reaches of Wilson Creek, where 15.4 miles of river are popular for fishing, swimming, hiking and kayaking.

For nine miles, Wilson Creek squeezes through a rugged gorge that is surrounded by the Pisgah National Forest. Rapids with names like "Boatbuster" and "Thunderhole" are found here. Designated as recreational, this river section includes a difficult run with Class II-IV rapids suited only to skilled paddlers who can ride the wild rapid whitewater.



Hikers and companions travel the Thorpes Creek Trail near Mortimer Campground in the Wilson Creek Area. (Photo by Julie Trzeciak)

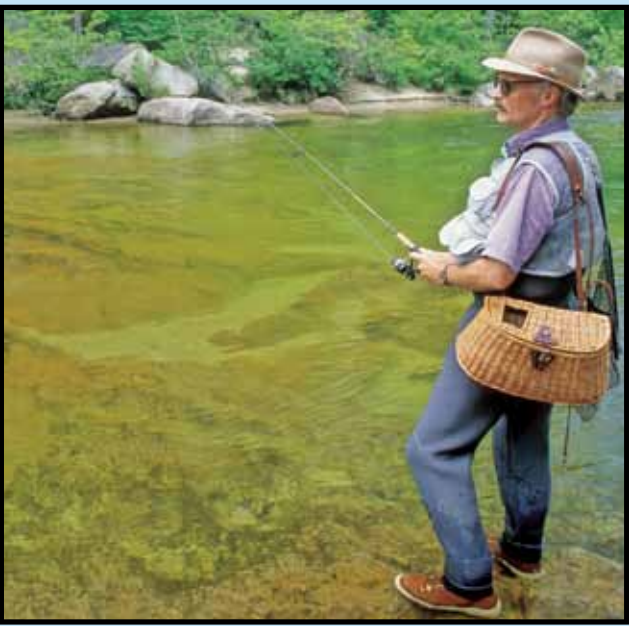
## GORGE INCLUDES GREAT SCENERY

In the Wilson Creek Gorge, the creek cuts through some of the oldest rocks in the Southern Appalachians. The 4,000-foot drop from its headwaters to Johns River is the greatest relief found anywhere along the Blue Ridge Escarpment. The large elevation span creates biological diversity where rare and endangered plants and animals exist.

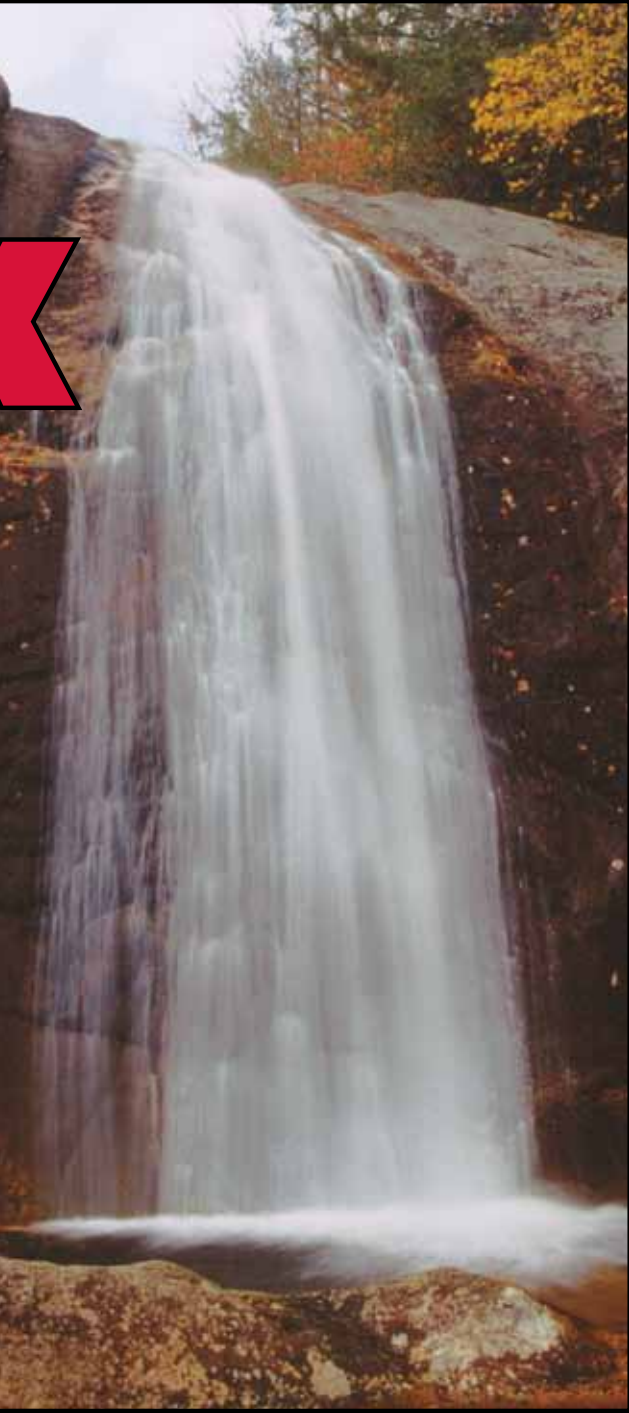
## WILDERNESS STUDY AREAS OFFER CHALLENGING HIKES

Managed to protect wilderness attributes are the Wilson Creek Area and Lost Cove and Harper Creek Wilderness Study Areas. In these areas, trails travel steep, rugged terrain to excellent views of mountains and cliffs, rolling creeks and waterfalls.

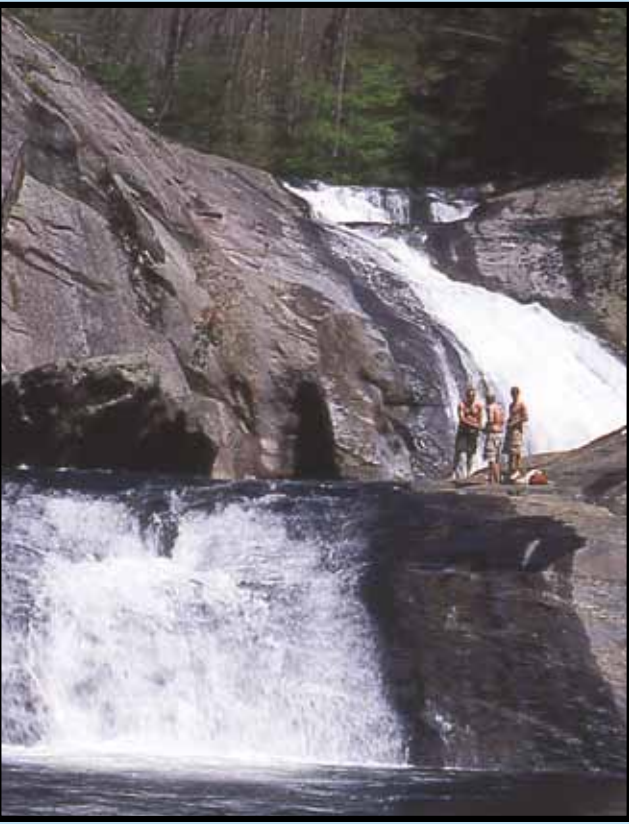
Wilson Creek follows the southeast side of Lost Cove Wilderness Study Area, and the Blue Ridge Parkway borders Lost Cove's northwest side. Surrounded by high elevation cliffs, Lost Cove's elevations range from 1,700 to 3,900 feet. Trails lead to Hunt Fish Falls and Gragg Prong Falls, beauties worth stopping to view. Harper Creek Wilderness Study Area is crossed by a trail network that leads to streams and a variety of waterfalls.



An angler casts his line for trout in Wilson Creek, considered wild waters and wild trout waters. (Photo by Bill Lea)



From the North Harper Creek Trail, hikers can spot the 40-foot North Harper Creek Falls that drops into a 50-foot-wide pool. (Photo by Mark Bradshaw)



Sunbathers enjoy the Harper Creek rock beach. (Photo by Mark Bradshaw)

## Where can we camp?

Visitors can camp in Mortimer Campground, located next to Thorpe Creek off NC 90. This first-come first served campground offers 19 sites with tent pads and grills and a picnic shelter with four tables. Accessible flush toilets and showers are available. Hiking trails and a trout stream are nearby.

In addition, many opportunities exist for dispersed camping in Wilson Creek. For more information, call the Grandfather District Office at (828) 652-2144.

## Where can't we camp?

No overnight camping is allowed for a two-mile stretch for 500 feet on either side of Wilson Creek in the gorge. Drinking of alcoholic beverages is also banned in these gorge areas. To remind visitors of these regulations, signs are posted along Brown Mountain Beach Road.

In addition, camping is not allowed in maintained wildlife openings.

## Can we hunt and fish?

Fishing and hunting are very popular in the Wilson Creek. Many game animals, such as deer, black bear and wild turkey thrive in the area in this Pisgah National Forest. Miles of streams offer warm-water and cold-water fishing. Some waters are stocked and others support wild fish.

## Where can we ride horses?

The Wilson Ridge Trail is open to horses. Riders also travel on gated roads, such as Schoolhouse Ridge Road.

While horseback riding offers another dimension to the backcountry experience, horses require special considerations and care. To minimize the impact of you and your horse's visit, please follow these no-trace techniques:

- Take only fit, calm and experienced animals.
- Ride single file and make sure your animals stay on the trails.
- Water horses at natural fords or from a bucket.
- Keep stock tethered at least 200 feet away from streams and away from trails and campsites.
- Avoid even temporarily tying stock to trees. Use a highline with tree-saver straps to tether your animal. This prevents stock from trampling roots and chewing bark.
- Break up and scatter manure and fill in pawed holes when breaking camp.
- Pack some feed, since grazing is limited. Be certain that the feed is weed-free to prevent noxious plants from spreading.

## Bicycles are not allowed in the Lost Cove and Harper Creek wilderness study areas.

ROAD SIGN

981

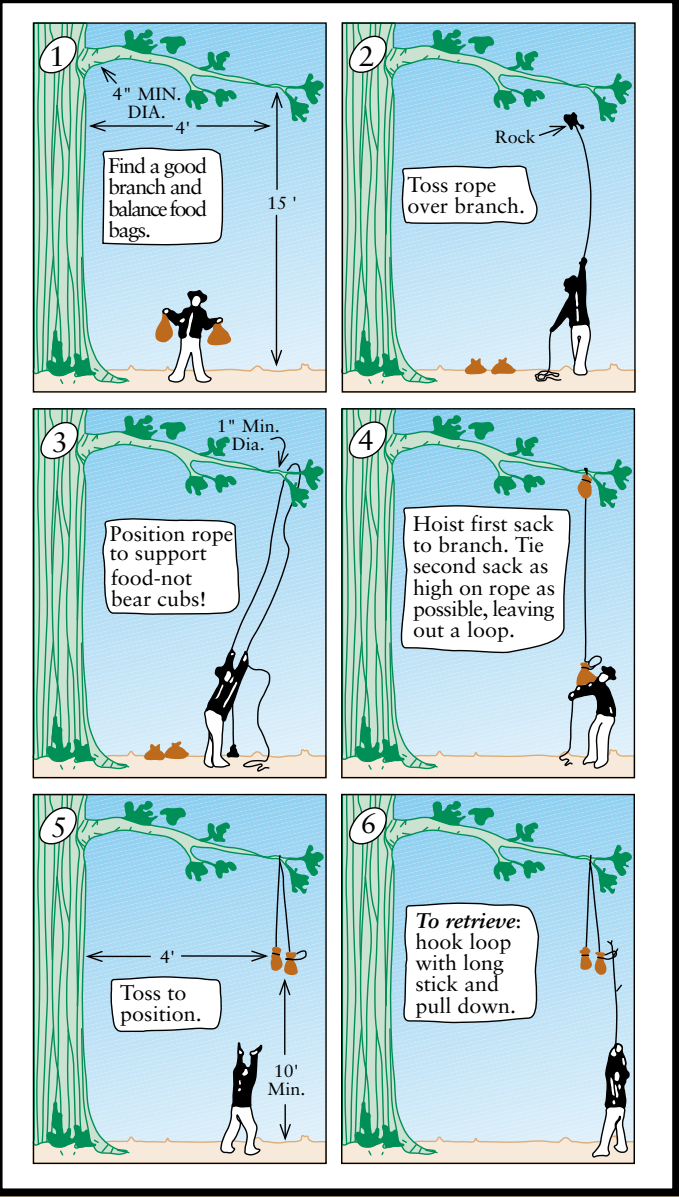
Bikes, horses and hikers are ONLY allowed on the signed trails and roads shown on map. Both trails and roads are marked by vertical signs. All routes are open to hikers.

THORPESCREEK

TRAIL SIGN



**CHECK OUT VISITOR CENTER...**  
The Caldwell County Chamber of Commerce operates this visitor center April through November on Wilson Creek Road. (Photo provided by Caldwell County Chamber of Commerce)



Bearproof food by placing items in two bags and hanging from a tree.

## Bears in backcountry

- If you see a bear, keep your distance.
- If a bear approaches, DON'T RUN. Slowly back away watching the bear. Frighten the bear by yelling and throwing rocks.
- Maintain a clean camp. Pack out all food and trash.
- Keep cooking and eating areas separate from sleeping areas. Keep tents free of food and food odors.
- At night, secure food and other attractants at least 10 feet off the ground and four feet from the tree trunk.

## Watch for wildlife

- Observe wildlife from a distance. Do not follow or approach them.
- No camping is allowed in maintained wildlife openings.
- Never feed animals. Feeding wildlife damages their health, alters natural behaviors and exposes them to predators and other dangers.
- If you see a bear, keep your distance. If a bear approaches, Don't run. Slowly back away watching the bear. Try to frighten the bear by yelling, throwing rocks and making noise.
- This is bear country. Cook and store food away from your camp.
- Control dogs at all times or leave them at home.
- Avoid wildlife during sensitive times: mating, nesting or raising young.

## TRAIL DIFFICULTY

**EASY**  
These routes are appropriate for novice through advanced users. The trails generally follow obvious, well-marked trails and roads. Grades are gentle, and few obstacles are encountered.

**MORE DIFFICULT**  
These more challenging routes are appropriate for intermediate through advanced users. Terrain may be steeper, trails narrower and some obstacles may be encountered.

**MOST DIFFICULT**  
These routes are recommended for advanced to expert users only. Terrain is steep, and routes are not well marked. Considerable skill is required, as well as knowledge and survival.



## RESPECT THE RIGHT OF WAY

Hikers yield to equestrians. Mountain bikers yield to hikers and horseback riders. Off-highway vehicle riders yield to equestrians, hikers and mountain bikers. Be courteous to every user of the National Forests in North Carolina.

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