

Stakeholders Forum for the Nantahala & Pisgah Plan Revision

Tuesday, November 1, 2016

10:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m.

Lake Logan Episcopal Center
25 Wormy Chestnut Lane, Canton

Stakeholders Forum:

Sam Evans, SELC

Ruth Hartzler, Carolina Mountain Club

Rob Elliot, Evergreen Packaging

Julie White, SORBA/IMBA

Morgan Somerville, Appalachian Trail Conservancy

Bill Yarborough, NC Dept. of Agriculture

Susan Fletcher, Pisgah Hardwood

Bill Hodge, Southern Appalachian Wilderness Stewards

Ben Prater, Defenders of Wildlife

Megan Sutton, TNC

Gary Peters, National Wild Turkey Federation

Gordon Warburton, NC Wildlife Resources Commission (shared seat)

Andrea Leslie, NC Wildlife Resources Commission (shared seat)

David Reid, NC Sierra Club

Hugh Irwin, The Wilderness Society

David Whitmire, Fish and Wildlife Conservation Council

Jim Gray, Ruffed Grouse Society

Bill Kane, NC Wildlife Federation

Forest Service:

James Melonas

Michelle Aldridge

Cathy Dowd, US Forest Service

Heather Luczak, US Forest Service

Erik Crews, US Forest Service

Jason Rodrigue, US Forest Service

Sheryl Bryan, US Forest Service

Dave Casey, US Forest Service

Will Young, US Forest Service

Alternates/Observers:

Ryan Jacobs NC Wildlife Resources Commission (alternate for Gordon Warburton/Andrea Leslie)

Brent Martin, The Wilderness Society (alternate for Hugh Irwin)

G. Richard Mode, NC Wildlife Federation (alternate for Bill Kane)

Chris Coxen, Nat'l. Wild Turkey Federation (alternate for Gary Peters)

Jon Hallemeier, Coweeta History Project

National Forest Foundation:

Karen DiBari

Mark Shelley

Welcome and Greetings

Karen welcomed everyone and reviewed meeting logistics, offering thanks to the Organizing Committee for their multiple meetings in preparation for today's agenda.

James Melonas announced that Deborah Walker, Uwharrie District Ranger, was killed in a motorcycle accident over the weekend. This is tragic news for the forest and the community. The group observed a moment of silence in Deborah's memory.

James also provided an update on the multiple fires on the Forest and on the Cherokee NF. More fire prevention personnel coming in for support. We are experiencing very dangerous conditions across the region.

James also wanted to recognize Dave Casey, the new Ranger on the Tusquittee District. He also announced that Will Young will be acting Ranger on the Cheoah District for Angie Gee who is out on maternity leave.

MEETING OBJECTIVES

- Provide input to the Forest Service on the plan objectives
- Learn about the Forest Service's new Geographic Area construct and strategize how to support further development of MAs/GAs as opportunities to resolve conflicts
- Gain an understanding of the wilderness evaluation process and results
- Clarify Stakeholders Forum desired outcomes
- Agree on milestones to achieve those outcomes

COLLABORATION

Bill Kane talked about a common understanding of collaboration: a group of people working to achieve a common goal. How do we do it? There is a lot of common ground among groups and across interests. There may be a lot more common ground between interests than has yet been identified. It is unlikely that everyone will get everything they want, but if agreements are designed well then every member should be able to live with the outcome.

RECAP OF SUMMER ACTIVITIES

- Forest Products Field Trip
 - Site visits to Columbia, Gilkey Lumber, Domtar Chip Facility included great discussions—very open and helpful. Jim Sitts provided introductory remarks at Columbia from a forest products perspective.
- Float Trip – North Fork
 - Great opportunity to spend time together and strengthen relationships. Thanks to David.
- Lake Logan meeting with the Forest Supervisor
 - Provided space for conversations on key topics and to meet with Regional Forester Tony Tooke.
- Congressman Meadows meetings
 - Had good SF participation and were helpful for Congressman Meadows to understand

what the Forest Service and the SF are trying to accomplish.

OPENING THOUGHTS (Michelle/James)

James asked the group to think innovatively and to try to get away from the “zero sum gain” approach and think about the way we are going to manage the Forest. We have a window of opportunity to try something different. The Nantahala & Pisgah National Forests can lead the country and set an example for how forest plans can be framed.

James pointed to the need for all to practice humility, empathy and hard work in order to develop a collaborative approach to the forest plan.

OBJECTIVES

The draft Plan objectives have been posted online for some time. The Forest Service is trying to wrap up the public input phase. Michelle Aldridge presented the rationale for how the objectives were developed, enlisted feedback, and described what is planned next in the process.

The SF broke into small groups to discuss the objectives, focusing on recreation, clean water, and restoration. Each group responded to the following questions:

- How might the objectives change in an alternative where we have a realistic level of additional resources?
- Besides what you have shared already, what did the Forest Service miss or not frame well?

MANAGEMENT AREAS AND GEOGRAPHIC AREAS

Michelle Aldridge offered a history of the Management Area (MA) approach thus far, the challenges they presented and a newly developed construct for moving forward.

In mid-August, the Forest was prepping for upcoming MA meetings on the Grandfather District, the first of the open house sessions. They reviewed the front- mid- and back country “buckets” as an interdisciplinary team (IDT) one last time, expecting to send it to Steering Team for a final check before it was shared publically. They found problems inherent in the construct and some of the same challenges the Stakeholder Forum has been struggling with for a while.

- Had trouble differentiating how mid and front country would be managed
- Front, mid and backcountry areas weren’t contiguous
- Economics and recreation weren’t reflected
- Values weren’t able to be discussed effectively

It became clear that the front, mid and backcountry construct wasn’t an effective path. So the Forest Service developed a new plan:

1. Forestwide DOGS (desired conditions, objectives, guidelines and standards)
2. Geographic Areas – 12 “wall to wall” areas, each with a set of goals for restoration, recreation, and unique places on the forest with articulated management approaches and place-based goals.
3. Management Areas – these will be applied across the forest and will help provide sideboards.

References:

- Geographic Area/Management Area (GAMA) information can be found at: <https://www.fs.usda.gov/detail/nfsnc/home/?cid=fseprd491137>
- Mock-up of a Geographic Area - Black Mountains (please note that with three existing Wilderness Study Areas (WSAs) and lots of Inventoried Roadless Areas (IRAs), the Black Mountains area has an overrepresentation of special designations when compared to other portions of the forest). Michelle Aldridge, Forest Planner – Management Areas and Geographic Areas PowerPoint presentation. <https://www.nationalforests.org/who-we-are/regional-offices/eastern-regional-program/stakeholdersforum>

Michelle also introduced another plan component they are considering: vegetative management priority areas, which would designate priority places for vegetation management over the life of the plan. These are not project boundaries, but are larger than that. These are focus areas where the FS thinks large landscape veg management restoration work will take place. This is informed by FS analysis of departure, operability, input from the public (Wildlife Active Habitat Management Areas (WHAMAs), Natural Area Priorities (NAPs), and an intent to contribute to the economic vitality of western NC communities. They will be updated during the 10 year review of the Plan. This plan component is still under construction.

Michelle presented **Other Management Areas which includes Interface, Matrix, Backcountry and Special Interest and Other MAs**. This is included in Michelle Aldridge's PowerPoint presentation which can be accessed at: <https://www.nationalforests.org/stakeholdersforum>

NEXT STEPS

Nov/Dec 2016

- Districts developing Geographic Area content
- IDT applying criteria for developing priority veg areas
- IDT re-examining Natural Area Priorities (NAPs) and Wildlife Active Habitat Management Areas (WHAMA) layers.

Jan 2017

- IDT review where GAs landed on the landscape

Feb 2017

- Open IDT meeting on each zone (Pisgah and Nantahala) to look at the GAs collectively on the landscape

Action: SF Members requested details for:

- Matrix MA
- Vegetation Management Areas (VMA)
- Interested in seeing where VMAs land

Discussion about the GAMAS

Members of the SF expressed general support for the GAMA approach, stating that it is a great way to communicate goals, include multiple interests, and should be easily understandable by the public.

Specific comments included:

- Need to revise priority watersheds identified in 2014 with objectives. This work needs to be updated and integrated into Forest Plan.
- Construct is more functional and aligns with landscape ecology.
- Provides for the optimization of values among diverse interests.
- Challenging discussions at the area (on the ground) discussion level.
- Geographical Areas provide space for introducing other goals in an area.
- This could be helpful as we engage counties.

Using the previous SF statement of support for the wilderness nomination process as a model, Karen asked if the SF members wanted to release a similar statement of support for the GAMA construct. Some within the group expressed a concern about making a statement now, wanting to have the specific information in the Geographic Areas available first before stating support.

WILDERNESS EVALUATION PROCESS AND RESULTS

Presented by Heather Luczak – see presentation, available at www.nationalforests.org/stakeholdersforum
James Melonas stated that the FS is reviewing comments and completing the evaluation.

STAKEHOLDERS FORUM DESIRED OUTCOMES AND MILESTONES

A number of SF members felt that they needed a more complete picture on technical issues in order to speak more knowledgeably to others in the community. Topics identified by the FS and the Organizing Committee include:

- Wild and scenic river designation process
- Timber suitability
- Species of conservation concern
- Old growth
- Natural range of variation
- Monitoring, including baseline monitoring for wildlife
- Wildlife habitat management and monitoring
- Recreation

The Forest Service needs time and space for working on EIS. They will further develop and work the new construct, share it and let the SF (and the public) provide input.

SUMMARY OF ACTION ITEMS

- SF Members requested details for Matrix MA and Vegetation Management Priority Areas.
- The NFF will work with the Forest Service to schedule a webinar on technical issues.
- The NFF will work with Organizing Committee to identify steps/timing for SF activities between now and the spring SF meeting.
 - Spring meeting team (April)
 - Potentially another meeting in the fall / prior to the draft plan release
 - Will try to build a plan for county engagement
 - Webinar