

MEETING RECORD
Stakeholders Forum for the Nantahala & Pisgah
Plan Revision DRAFT Meeting Record
Tuesday April 12, 2016
10:00 AM - 4:00 PM
Heaven's Cloud Center
130 Sardis Road Asheville , NC

Members

Kevin Colburn, American Whitewater
JD Diefenbach, Sierra Club, Wenoca Chapter
Phil Elliott, Columbia Forest Product
Sam Evans, Southern Environmental Law Center
Susan Fletcher, Pisgah Hardwoods
Jim Gray, Ruffed Grouse Society
Ruth Hartzler, Carolina Mountain Club
Lang Hornthal, Root Cause
Hugh Irwin, The Wilderness Society
Ryan Jacobs, Wildlife Resources Commission
Bill Kane, NC Wildlife Federation
Josh Kelly, MountainTrue
Zach Lesch-Huie, Access Fund
Andrea Leslie, Wildlife Resource Commission
Deirdre Lightsey, Back Country Horsemen of NC
Ben Prater, Defenders of Wildlife
Jim Sitts, Columbia Forest Products
Curtis Smalling, National Audubon of NC
Megan Sutton, The Nature Conservancy
Gordon Warburton, Wildlife Resources Commission
Julie White, SORBA/IMBA
David Whitmire, Fish and Wildlife Conservation Council
Bill Yarborough, Commission of Agriculture, North Carolina
Morgan Sommerville, Appalachian Trail Conservancy
Greg Yates, NC State Forest Service

Alternates Attending as Observers

Bob Gale, Mountain True
Ryan Jacobs, Wildlife Resources Commission
Richard Mode, NC Wildlife Federation

U. S. Forest Service

James Melonas, National Forests of NC
Michelle Aldridge, National Forests of NC

National Forest Foundation

Karen DiBari, National Forest Foundation

Mark Shelley, National Forest Foundation

Welcome

Karen DiBari welcomed all participants to the meeting. Twenty-five Stakeholders Forum (SF) members (or their designated alternate) were present. Members were joined by 9 Forest Service staff and 8 additional observers. Everyone in the room introduced themselves.

Karen opened by introducing the objectives to be covered during the meeting, which include:

- Discuss recreation committee recommendations on forest-wide desired conditions and identify areas of agreement, gaps, and the issues of concern regarding areas of disagreement
- Present work of map committee and identify areas of agreement and next steps for moving forward
- Review tools available to the Forest Service to achieve different management objectives
- Lay the foundation for special areas discussions
- Identify next steps to prepare for May meeting

The NFF shared the “Recommendations Structure” document and the group reviewed the status of their work.

Karen also distributed a sheet outlining the objectives and activities of each meeting through late 2017 in the context of the broader plan revision process. The SF will meet again in May and then will take a break from formal meetings over the summer.

In response to a question from a SF member, Karen asked the SF if there are any objections to members being able to share the proposed recommendations with their organizations. All were supportive of sharing information.

Forest Service Update – James Melonas

The Forest Service is sharing more plan components online. The goal for fall is to release a draft environmental impact statement (EIS) and draft plan. It would be helpful to have the SF reconvene in the fall to review and provide feedback as a collective group, and also to hear from the Forest Service about how they incorporated SF input into the plan.

James expressed appreciation for the input and recommendations from the SF regarding forest-wide plan components and management area proposals, and said that the concepts and ideas expressed by the Forum will be invaluable in drafting the plan for forest management.

Recreation Committee Recommendations

Recreation Committee participants include:

Ruth Hartzler
Julie White
Bill Hodge
Sam Evans

David Whitmire
Diedre Lightsey
Zach Lesch-Huie

The Recreation Committee distributed a discussion draft prior to the SF meeting to outline modifications and additions to the existing Forest Service draft plan. The draft consists of goals and recommendations for recreational settings, concentrated use areas and trails.

During discussion regarding recommendations among SF members there was some concern regarding access to water and legacy bans of non-motorized boating on waterways. The Forest Service responded that the boating ban on the Chattooga River would not be addressed in the plan revision.

The SF discussed recreational impacts on the forest and the need to draft a better definition of “sustainable recreation” in order to better guide the Forest Service in areas of management and restoration. The SF also discussed the term “Special Areas.” Group members are concerned that if some of these areas are not indicated specifically to the Forest Service that they may be overlooked in the course of the plan. Members of the SF felt that the term “special” may be confusing language.

Consensus Decision: The SF agreed to present the goals and recommendations put forth by the Recreation Committee to the Forest Service.

Forest Service Next Steps – Michelle Aldridge

Michelle Aldridge indicated that the Forest Service will consider the SF recommendations regarding forest-wide plan components in order to determine how they fit within the context of the plan. She stated that not everything in the recommendations will be incorporated, but that the information provided by the SF has been very useful to the interdisciplinary team and the NPNF in development of the plan.

Addendum – Recreational Users Council

The Recreational Committee presented an addendum to the Sustainable Recreation recommendations consisting of a proposed conceptual Recreational Users Council (RUC) that would be for coordination between representatives of organized groups and special use members and the Forest Service. The RUC would guide user groups in assisting the Forest Service with maintenance, raising funds and volunteer support, and help user groups

understand and embrace the importance and value of forest management and recreational uses. The purpose of the RUC would also be to assist the Forest Service in understanding the needs and desires of various recreation groups in regards to the management of the forest. The document is not proposed to be an aspect of the plan, but to set out the concept of an ongoing forum to continue collaboration amongst various recreational groups to mitigate conflict and guide volunteerism.

Various members of the SF raised concerns about establishing a formal group with a memorandum of understanding with the Forest Service. The Recreation Committee assured the Forum that the concept was proposed as a coordination point for all groups with interests in recreation to have a voice, air grievances, reduce user conflicts and continue dialogue with the Forest Service once the plan has been finalized.

The Forest Service responded that they agree the concept is good in helping find direction forward, but to not get overly involved on the idea of what the RUC will precisely do and to remain focused on the purpose of why such a group would be developed.

Map Committee Presentation

Members include:

Hugh Irwin

Josh Kelly

Ryan Jacobs

Gary Peters (not present)

Carly Lewis presented the work of the map committee for consideration by the full SF. Her presentation goals were to update assumptions and sideboards, and define a dichotomous key for assigning management areas and identify common ground areas. (See attached presentation.) Currently designated areas and consist of designated Wilderness, inventoried roadless, wilderness study, special interest and research natural areas as well as the Cradle of Forestry, Roan Mountain, Appalachian Trail corridor, experimental forests, the Blue Ridge Parkway and historic, cultural and scenic river corridors. As presented in March, the Map Committee set out as its purpose to determine areas of “no conflict” as well as where interests overlap. Two major data sets were used: wildlife priority areas and natural area priorities.

The Map Committee has simplified the definitions of management areas down to three “buckets” which are Front Country, Mid Country and Back Country, but with looser designations than previously discussed in the Management Area Committee. This allowed the Map Committee to outline various mapping scenarios depending on differing opinions as to what should define an area as Front, Back or Mid Country.

The Map Committee had intended to meet to develop material for sharing at a meeting prior to the full SF meeting in April, but ran out of time.

Several SF members raised concerns about the data sets used, and expressed their discomfort in assuming broad-scale agreement about “no conflict” areas. In addition, Jim Gray stated that he had explicitly asked in March to attend the Map Committee meetings and wasn’t notified about them.

The SF discussed whether to focus on the areas where wildlife and natural area priorities overlap (and thus are potentially in conflict), or to focus on where there is seemingly no conflict, at least at a coarse level. After discussion about the value of including a restoration data set (and deciding that could be handled another way), most SF members expressed support for using the two major data sets as recommended by the Map Committee and focusing on the 80% “no conflict” areas as a starting point for more detailed discussions about appropriate management objectives within that 80%. Several SF members expressed they were uncomfortable with the proposal because they felt it could be misconstrued that they were supporting proposed wilderness.

Several SF members asked if there would ever be a point at which all members would be willing to discuss proposed wilderness, and if not, asked whether it was worth continuing to meet. Karen asked the members who were uncomfortable with the proposal (as stated above) if their need to honor their constituencies, particularly the counties who have anti-wilderness resolutions, was preventing them from being able to work toward agreement within the SF. Those members stated their intention to stay engaged with the SF and work in good faith toward finding the zone of agreement within the group.

James Melonas reminded SF members that this plan is in regards to forest-wide management direction and not project level planning, and that the Forest Service will move forward with or without input from the SF.

Consensus Decisions (everyone thumbs up or to the side):

- The SF agreed to continue moving forward as a group in discussion regarding the non-overlapping areas, using the wildlife and natural area priorities.
- The SF agreed to use the three bucket method for mapping moving forward, as long as the other pieces included in the Management Area Committee’s framework are worked into the Front, Mid and Back-country definitions.

Actions:

- SF members requested that the NFF notify all members of committee meeting times and dates and the NFF agreed to do this.
- Ryan Jacobs and Jim Gray will talk in detail about the wildlife data sets that were used by the Map Committee.
- The Forest Service will determine how to share the mapping data and a process for moving forward.

Special Areas Ad Hoc Committee

A new committee focusing on special areas has been formed to help frame the discussion. The Committee will include:

Kevin Colburn
Sam Evans
Jim Gray
Hugh Irwin

Susan Fletcher
JD Diefenbach
Bill Yarborough

Sideboards and Tools to Achieve Various Management Objectives Presentation

Michelle was unable to present the sideboards and tools for management objectives due to lack of time.

Summary of SF Decisions

- Karen reported that the March meeting record and Code of Conduct changes were agreed upon by the group electronically, and will be posted on the SF webpage.
- The SF agreed to present the goals and recommendations put forth by the Recreation Committee to the Forest Service.
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