

**MEETING OF THE
STAKEHOLDER FORUM FOR THE NANTAHALA AND PISGAH PLAN REVISION
PISGAH FOCUS MEETING RECORD**

Tuesday, June 6, 2016

10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.

Lake Logan Episcopal Center

25 Wormy Chestnut Lane, Canton, North Carolina

Stakeholders Forum

Kevin Colburn, American Whitewater
J.D. Diefenbach, Sierra Club, Wenoca Chapter
Rob Elliot, Evergreen Packaging
Sam Evans, Southern Environmental Law
Center
Susan Fletcher, Pisgah Hardwood
Jim Gray, Ruffed Grouse Society
Ruth Hartzler, Carolina Mountain Club
Bill Hodge, Southern Appalachian Wilderness
Stewards
Hugh Irwin, The Wilderness Society
Lang Hornthal, Root Cause Bill Kane, North
Carolina Wildlife Federation
Zach Lesch-Huie, Access Fund
Andrea Leslie, North Carolina Wildlife
Resources Commission

Deirdre Lightsey, Back County Horseman of
North Carolina and Headwaters Outfitters
Gary Peters, National Wild Turkey Federation
Ben Prater, Defenders of Wildlife
Morgan Somerville, Appalachian Trail
Conservancy
Megan Sutton, The Nature Conservancy
Gordon Warburton, North Carolina Wildlife
Resources Commission
Julie White, Southern Off-Road Bicycle
Association and International Mountain
Bicycling Association
David Whitmire, Fish and Wildlife Conservation
Council
Bill Yarborough, North Carolina Department of
Agriculture

USDA Forest Service

Michelle Aldridge
Sheryl Bryan
Dave Casey
Alice Cohen
Eric Crews
William Davis
Logan Free
Larry Hayden
Gary Kauffman

Nick Larson
Jake Lubern
Heather Luczak
Matt McCombs
Allen Nicholas
Susan Parker
Jason Rodrigue
Holly Stratton
Amber Vanderwolf

Alternates and Observers

Mary Lou Addor
Chris Coxen
Fred Hardin

Don Mallicoat
David Reid

National Forest Foundation

Karen DiBari
Ben Irely

Mark Shelley

WELCOME AND GREETINGS – Karen DiBari

Meeting attendees introduced themselves and housekeeping items were addressed.

Members affirmed that they had read the Collaborative Commitment Statement and registered their intent to uphold it throughout the Stakeholders Forum (SF) process. It is the hope that, by having committed to that statement, the fear of other members not acting in good faith would be dispensed and everyone can focus on the work at hand.

OPENING THOUGHTS

Forest Service – Allen Nicholas

Thanks to all for your involvement and time. This is time away from family and a lot of work. And thanks to the Forest Service Interdisciplinary (ID) Team for all the hard work that has gotten us to this point. The Forest Service is looking forward to the conversation today, to move forward and set the path that goes beyond this meeting.

We also want you to know that the Forest Service is having conversations with the counties with regard to forest planning, mainly regarding the topic of economic development.

Organizing Committee – Rob Elliot

Rob described an article, “Pink Beds to be Developed as *Birthplace of Forestry*,” which speaks to what is possible here today. This article is about a group from various backgrounds, coming together at the Sit and Whittle Lodge in the 1800s and leaving a lasting legacy.

The Organizing Committee (OC) met several times since the last full SF meeting in November. The OC is made up of a subset of the interests in this room. The strength of this SF is its diversity of interests. We should all recognize this today, and recognize that there is a lot of opportunity for agreement here, if we are all willing.

The OC put together a code of conduct for the SF to use while outreaching to counties. Basically, it is a guiding document for the County Outreach Committee. One of the important goals of the Committee is to listen. When we get this County Outreach document completed, we will roll it out to the full SF.

The OC released the Collaborative Commitment Statement, which was well received by the full SF. They also released the Transparency Statement, which was approved by the full SF. This statement was meant to gain agreement on considering these materials released by the Forest Service as draft materials and to be sure to be helpful to the agency during this draft phase.

Plan activity timeline review, context, and plan for the meeting – Karen DiBari

The SF has had access to some informational webinars and field trips to keep up on Forest Plan developments in between the last SF meeting in November and today and a number of SF members were involved with the development of this meeting's objectives and agenda, therefore, we should be well positioned to have a productive meeting.

The objectives for this meeting are to: (1) gain familiarity with the pre-draft Management Areas (MA) and Geographic Areas (GA) chapters, and the Forest Service process behind developing them; (2) provide initial feedback on the Pisgah National Forest MA and GA chapters and identify MAs and GAs with conflicting interests that merit more discussion; and (3) determine how the SF members and alternates can serve as ambassadors for the ongoing plan revision process during the Ranger District-level meetings planned for this summer.

Looking ahead, in June and July there will be District meetings that are open to the public. We are hoping that the SF will have plenty of presence at those meetings. Also, there will be a series of facilitated collaborative discussions around areas ripe for collaboration to support SF members in identifying options. The SF will provide its input to the Forest Service by September 1.

During next fall, winter, and spring the Forest Service ID Team will write the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS). During this time period there will be continued SF collaborative discussions, but we need to determine what those will look like. In the spring of 2018 the SF will meet prior to the release of the DEIS.

Q: Will the SF continue after the Plan is finalized?

A: Based on the purpose and goals this group identified when it was first formed, it's purpose is to work through Plan development, not to be involved in implementation. Unless the group wants to change this, the SF will sunset when the Plan is finished.

MEMBERSHIP

There are currently several nominees for membership on the SF: Gordon Warburton and Ryan Jacobs. These two nominees agreed to the Collaborative Commitment Statement, just like everyone else has.

Discussion points:

- This group may represent a spectrum of interests, but there is a desire that it be more ethnically and age diverse.
- It would be difficult to bring a lot more people in at this point. At least we have some different gender representation.

CONSENSUS DECISIONS:

- The SF approved Ryan Jacobs for membership with consensus.
- The SF approved Gordon Warburton for membership with consensus.

OVERVIEW OF MANAGEMENT AREAS AND GEOGRAPHIC AREA CHAPTERS: THE FOREST PERSPECTIVE – Michelle Aldridge

[Please see the associated PowerPoint presentation]

As a reminder, this is pre-draft material; we are just sharing our current thinking and asking for input.

There is a lot more information currently on the [Nantahala and Pisgah National Forests Plan Revision](#) website. Lots of great work has been done thus far by the Forest Service planning team. If you go to the [Forest Plan Under Construction](#) webpage, you will find the [Management Area Plan Direction](#), [Identifying Possible Special Interest Areas](#), [Wild and Scenic Rivers](#), [Refining Management Area Lines with WHAMAs and NAPs](#); and [the map display of areas that may be analyzed as Recommended Wilderness](#). You will also find Chapter 4, [Geographic Areas Introduction](#) and a description of each GA.

Everyone here has a copy of a new document, [Nantahala and Pisgah Forest Plan Revision Readers Guide](#), which is the ‘Reader’s Digest’ version of the Forest Plan building blocks that are currently being shared. This document reviews key concepts of Interface, Matrix, and Backcountry areas.

It is important to emphasize that Interface, Matrix, and Backcountry are not the same as front country and mid country. Interface is the main portal for access and is focused on access. For example Pisgah Ledge GA has lots of interface because it is the most heavily used area. We will still do active management in these areas, but that management will recognize the human use. Matrix areas are edge and interior habitat with low levels of recreation. Backcountry hasn’t changed since we last talked about it. In backcountry there are limited facilities and limited active management. These areas are remote and unroaded and are primarily shaped by natural forces.

GAs tell you the specific goals for that particular area. MAs describe the specific tools that can be used in that area for achieving those goals.

The Forest Service frequently gets the question, “where can we do mechanical harvests?” You can mechanically harvest in interface, matrix, and backcountry, but it will be used differently in each to meet the goals of the area. For example, there is a vegetation management objective that applies to interface and matrix areas. That objective is to restore young forest conditions using mechanical treatment as a tool on between 650 and 1,200 acres annually. The new Forest Plan will have more suitable acres in it than the old plan.

SMALL GROUP GEOGRAPHIC AREA REVIEW

[The SF broke into four groups, then a Forest Service representative gave an introductory description of the GA. Each group went through a series of questions with regard each of the five Pisgah GAs. This process was repeated for each Pisgah GA.]

Links to compiled small group notes:

- [June 6 Pisgah compiled notes google doc](#)
- [June 6 Pisgah compiled notes](#)

Group Discussion Regarding GA Review Process

- It would be helpful to have trail layers, landmarks, county lines, and rivers on the maps.
- Diverse representation in small groups worked well.
- It would be helpful to have more info on public input for wilderness recommendations on the map.
- Everyone did their homework and was well prepared. The process went smoothly.
- We were able to provide feedback without generating back and forth.
- The tone was positive.
- We were able to bookmark issues in the notes. It will be important for moving forward to not lose track of those.
- Thanks to all the Forest Service staff for roving, it made the process smooth.
- It would be helpful to have a set of contour maps for reference.
- The contrast between GAs became clear the further we moved along.

Opportunities for collaborative dialog

Eastern Escarpment: Connectivity of mountain bike trails (Harpers/Lost Cove); area west of Linville (N. half of Dobson Knob); mountain bike restoration; public open houses; old growth; partnerships; stewardship contracts; differing views on Sugar Cove Harpers Creek Lost Cove; and aquatic restoration plan for Johns River Watershed.

Black Mountains: Trail sustainability on higher use trails (e.g. Black Mountain Crest Trail); Big Ivy (lots of discussion) and Shope; restoration in rich cove ecozones; areas accessible for management; and collaboration around wildland urban interface (WUI) and fire threats.

Bald Mountains: Support elk habitat, elk education, and wilderness recommendations. Shelton Laurel; bike opportunities from Hot Springs; cross boundary collaboration with partners; opportunities with Roan Mountain Stewardship; elk management; opportunity to provide full support on this GA; area around state line; and connectivity and access issues.

Pisgah Ledge: Daniel Ridge; matrix to backcountry; scenic inventory analysis for recreation; restoration opportunities on Never Ending Road Area; Cedar Rock; recreation values on 276 corridor; fire management; and restoration in Cradle of Forestry and spruce areas.

North Slope: How to achieve restoration goals in GA with so much Wilderness, may need to be more intensive and balanced. Challenges of high visitation management; partnerships, full agreement in this GA, prescribed fire in Shining Rock; room for dialog for what can and cannot be accessed.

General feedback from the SF

- When putting together agenda, recognize there are areas close to agreement and areas of greater conflict.
- We got tripped up on full agreement around matrix land.
- We were looking for more clear criteria.
- We recognized the potential for backcountry lands in matrix.
- Next step: prioritize what gets discussed next (conflict areas versus areas of agreement).

- Not everyone may want to be a part of every discussion.

Ideas about SF members supporting engagement in District meetings

District meetings will be between 2 to 3 hours. They will be an open house format: no presentations and lots of opportunity for one-on-one interactions.

Q: Is there a chance SF presence could be a negative instead of a positive?

A: From the Forest Service's perspective, the SF's presence will be all positive.

DRAFT