



Protect America's Climbing

**Access Fund-Carolina Climbers Coalition Proposals
Submitted for Consideration and Support to the National Forest Forum and Nantahala-
Pisgah Forest Partnership
July 25, 2017, Updated July 28, 2017**

Fixed Anchors

AF and CCC recommend the following fixed anchor guidance for the NPFP plan, based on the Access Fund-American Alpine Club fixed anchor position, other USFS management plans and the USFS definition of fixed anchors.¹ We recommend this guidance language be included as a Standard under Recreation Settings: Opportunities.

Non-Wilderness Management Areas

Use, placement and replacement of fixed anchors are essential for climbing and resource management. Fixed anchors are appropriate and should be allowed where necessary; and to enable a rappel where no other safe means of descent are available, or where use of fixed anchors may reduce impacts to sensitive resources.

Wilderness

Use, placement and replacement of fixed anchors are essential for climbing and resource management. Fixed anchors are appropriate and should be allowed where necessary, in areas impassable by the use of removable anchors, to enable a rappel where no other safe means of descent are available, or where use of fixed anchors may reduce impacts to sensitive resources. In Wilderness, any fixed anchors must be placed by hand drill.

Related to climbing in Wilderness, we also recommend NPNF promote a "Wilderness Climbing Ethic", as outlined by Access Fund, The American Alpine Club, The Wilderness Society, Outdoor Alliance and National Park Conservation Association on the Wilderness Climbing Ethics poster.²

¹ https://www.accessfund.org/uploads/pdf/AF-AAC_FixedAnchorPolicy_20150428.pdf

² View poster here: https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B0LwB_CxEUEIbktZQjJxZlJdE0/view?usp=sharing

Use of Erosion Control/Mitigation for Non-System Trail Management

User-created access routes that are not part of the Forest's designated trail system (social trails and other over-land travel routes) are critical to providing recreational access to dispersed recreation sites like climbing areas, scenic overlooks, waterfalls, and access for hunters and anglers.

We recommend utilizing erosion control/mitigation activities to sustainably manage these non-system access routes. This could be added to the Trails section of the plan under a Management Approach.

Proposal: add additional Management Approach to Recreation: Trails section of plan:

Maintain and restore access and sustainability for recreational resources that are not serviced by designated transportation systems or trail networks through activities such as erosion control and education.

Resource management

Peregrine Falcons and Wildlife

We recommend NPNF continue the successful seasonal Peregrine Falcon closure management program, and maintain collaboration and communications with the climbing community. The management approach responsible for the recovery of Western N.C.'s Peregrine Falcon population is a successful example of wildlife management and collaborative recreation management.

In this spirit we recommend an addition to Threatened and Endangered Species and/or Species of Conservation Concern management section, under Management Approaches:

Continue to support conservation and protection of peregrine falcons through monitoring, seasonal closure orders on rock faces, and collaboration with the climbing and recreation community.

Rare and Sensitive Plants

Cliff environments are home to both climbing resources and sensitive, rare and sometimes threatened or endangered plants and plant communities. We support increased collaboration with the climbing community, emphasizing education and site specific management to ensure sensitive and rare plant species and communities are protected. If site closures and restrictions are incorporated into area management, they should be substantiated with monitoring, study and ongoing collaboration with the climbing community. Strategic placement of fixed anchors should also be recognized as an effective resource management tool for mitigating or

eliminating impacts to sensitive cliff-area resources.

Proposal: we recommend the following language be added to to Rare Habitats, Management Approaches and/or Threatened and Endangered Species and Species of Conservation Concern management sections:

Maintain the integrity and resiliency of rare rock outcrop plant communities through site specific management, user group collaboration, stewardship and education.

Special Interest Areas

Recreation is listed as a potential defining characteristic for SIAs: unique attributes may be recreational, should remain persistent over time, and can benefit from specific management direction to maintain the special attributes of the resources in question. However, despite the available recreational criteria, we noted that few Special Interest Areas (MA-5) utilize recreation as a defining unique attribute. In fact in the current inventory only two SIAs are designated for unique recreational attributes, despite significant, longstanding recreational use within a majority of the listed SIAs. Linville Gorge, Looking Glass, and Whiteside Mountain--three of the Forest's most significant and highly visited recreational sites--are just three outstanding examples where recreation should be recognized as one of the unique attributes that warrants their SIA status.

In recognition of their unique recreational attributes, including rock and ice climbing, we recommend Recreation be listed in addition to the other qualifying criteria for the SIAs listed below. Climbing at these areas has remained persistent over time and could benefit from specific management direction to maintain the special attributes of the climbing resource.

- Black Mountains
- Craggy Mountains/Big Ivy
- Linville Gorge
- Bonas Defeat Gorge
- Cullasaja Gorge
- Ellicott Rock-Chattooga River Gorge
- Scaly Mountain and Catstairs
- Whiteside Mountain
- Whitewater Falls
- Dismal Falls
- Fork Ridge/Mount Hardy
- John Rock
- Black Rock Mtn/Granite City
- Looking Glass Rock
- Linville Dolomite
- Fodderstacks

Including Recreation in these areas' unique attributes is important and necessary to more accurately account for the unique characteristics which make these areas special. Doing so will memorialize needed management plan revisions that can substantiate the continued maintenance of valuable recreation and climbing opportunities.

Geographic Areas

We recommend changes and additions, which are listed by section and in greater detail below, to the the following Geographic Areas and Goals:

- Bald Mountains
- Eastern Escarpment
- Black Mountains
- Pisgah Ledge
- Highland Domes

Bald Mountains Geographic Area

Greater recognition of the unique winter-based recreation opportunities is needed in this area, including ice climbing, and related winter camping, cross country ski and snowshoe recreation.

Eastern Escarpment Geographic Area

The Eastern Escarpment is one of the most significant, valued and heavily visited climbing regions of the Pisgah-Nantahala National Forest, and of any National Forest in the Eastern United States. It contains a high number and concentration of climbing areas, and provides the full spectrum of climbing experiences, from Wilderness climbing to front country bouldering to winter ice climbing. Climbing areas include Big and Little Lost Cove, Linville Gorge and numerous other sites. Linville Gorge also boasts important climbing history for North Carolina and the Forest, and is likely to may have hosted some of the earliest climbing activity in the Forest. A thriving industry of permitted outdoor institutions and guide services have relied on Eastern Escarpment climbing areas to support their businesses for many decades. The history, significance and value of this region for climbing should be emphasized. We therefore appreciate recognition of climbing and climbing-related industry in the Connecting people to the land section. However we recommend a number of changes to better capture the region's climbing and recreational significance, and improve management strategy related to sensitive natural resources.

We recommend the following changes by section below. Changed or added paragraph sections are italicized.

Description of the area section

The region contains distinct projecting rocks and cliffs and sudden elevation changes - the most dramatic along the perimeter of Linville Gorge - *which offer highly valued scenery and recreational opportunities such as hiking, backpacking, and climbing.*

The description describes this region's backcountry recreation opportunities, of which there are many. However, it's important for accuracy and subsequent management to describe the substantial outdoor adventure and recreation opportunities that are found in "front" and "mid-country" areas, not only backcountry or Wilderness areas. For example, many climbing opportunities are found in matrix and interface areas, and at areas of concentrated recreational use. Similarly, the transition from backcountry to matrix and interface can be both complex and even abrupt. For example, while a great portion of Linville Gorge and Harpers Creek/Lost Cove areas are appropriately described as backcountry and difficult to access, the perimeters of these areas are in fact easily accessed by car, which leads to more front-country based use.

Goals

Connecting people to the land

Add two new goals:

Maintain and enhance access to the region's outstanding recreational opportunities for horseback riding, climbing, fishing, hiking, hunting, mountain biking, scenic viewing, rock hounding, wildlife viewing, whitewater boating and other sustainable recreation activities.

Improve monitoring and inventory of recreational use sites

Add new goal related to the need to address erosion and mitigate impacts on and to recreational resources that are not part of the Forest's designated sites or trails. This recommendation is based on other National Forest's use of 'erosion control/mitigation' in their management activities.

Maintain and restore access and sustainability for recreational resources that are not serviced by designated transportation systems or trail networks through activities such as erosion control and education.

Change and add to language on peregrine falcon goal:

Continue to support conservation and protection of peregrine falcons through monitoring, seasonal closure orders on rock faces, and collaboration with the climbing and recreation community.

Places to be managed in consideration of their unique features

Remove mention of hiking and climbing from (c) and (d) so they read as below:

(c) Emphasize treatment of non-native invasive species in Linville Gorge.

(d) Reduce or eliminate impacts to T&E species such as Heller's Blazing Star, mountain golden heather, and gnome lichens at Linville Gorge.

Alternatively, given the specificity of (c) and (d), consider removing from GA document and placing them in appropriate management chapter (Threatened and Endangered Species) guidelines, if not already there. More general language, such as below, could also be a replacement for use in the GA document:

Maintain the integrity and resiliency of rare rock outcrop plant communities through site specific management, user group collaboration, stewardship and education.

Opportunities to partner with others

Add to (b) to include Wilderness recreation

Partner with wilderness *and outdoor recreation* advocacy groups to assist in managing Linville Gorge Wilderness and the geographic area's wilderness study areas and in educating visitors about wilderness ethics and low impact camping *and climbing techniques*.

Add additional goal

Work with recreation groups to maintain the integrity and resiliency of rare plant communities through site specific management, stewardship and education.

Black Mountains Geographic Area

The Black Mountains Geographic Area offers unique and diverse climbing opportunities, including backcountry winter ice climbing opportunities and the more easily accessed sites of Snake Den and Corner Rock. Long winter climbing routes in the southeastern region are rare, and climbs on Celo Knob attract local and regional climbers. Snake Den, a historic climbing site, and nearby Corner Rock, a bouldering site of increasing popularity, are important resources for local climbers, guides and outdoor programs, while also attracting visitors from nearby states.

We appreciate the acknowledgements of the outdoor recreation tourism economy and climbing sites in this section.

We recommend the following edits and additions:

Description of the area: Connecting people to the land

(3rd paragraph, last sentence)

...and rock climbing is popular at Snake Den Cliff *and Corner Rock*.

Goals: Connecting people to the land

Maintain and enhance access to the region's outstanding recreational opportunities for horseback riding, climbing, fishing, hiking, hunting, mountain biking, scenic viewing, rock hounding, wildlife viewing, whitewater boating and other sustainable recreation activities.

Goals: Places to be managed in consideration of their unique features

Add additional focus under i. , e., under '(a) Manage the Big Ivy Area...':
i., e. Improving recreational management and stewardship

Add the following edit to ii.

Maintain and enhance dispersed recreation opportunities

Pisgah Ledge Geographic Area

Similar to the Eastern Escarpment, the Pisgah Ledge Geographic Area is an especially significant region to the climbing community. It offers a large number and high concentration of climbing sites and experiences, from remote, backcountry rock and ice climbing opportunities, to multi-day aid climbs to a variety of bouldering sites. These climbing areas are an essential part of the local region's outdoor recreation and education industries; many summer camps, colleges, guides and other outdoor programs utilize multiple different climbing sites in the area to give their participants and clients transformative climbing experiences. Local climbers from Asheville, Brevard, Hendersonville and other surrounding communities utilize these areas year-round, in addition to visitors from elsewhere in North Carolina and nearby states like South Carolina and Georgia. Areas like Looking Glass are nationally known and attract visitors from further afield.

We recognize and appreciate the acknowledgement of rock climbing in this section, however we recommend additions and changes and overall greater emphasis on climbing to better account for the climbing significance of this GA, and need for climbing related stewardship.

Description of area

Add language and a new sentence that describes trails, trail use and climbing:

The region is defined by mountain peaks and cliff faces that give way to narrow valleys with striking rivers and waterfalls. The mountainous landscape provides many ideal opportunities for hiking, biking, camping and climbing.

Goals: Enhancing and restoring resiliency

Edit to d), consistent with suggested edit recommended for Linville Gorge above

Continue to support conservation and protection of peregrine falcons through monitoring, seasonal closure orders on rock faces, and collaboration with the climbing and recreation community.

Goals: Connecting people to the land

Add new goal to emphasize recreational management focus:

Maintain and enhance mountain biking, climbing, paddling, hunting, fishing and sustainable recreational resources and experiences for which there is strong, ongoing demand.

Add new goal related to the need to address erosion and mitigate impacts to recreational resources that are not part of the Forest's designated sites or trails.

Maintain and enhance access to the region's outstanding recreational opportunities for horseback riding, climbing, fishing, hiking, hunting, mountain biking, scenic viewing, rock hounding, wildlife viewing, whitewater boating and other sustainable recreation activities.

Goals: Opportunities to partner with others

Remove and replace b) to be consistent with similar need in Eastern Escarpment

(d) Work with recreation groups to maintain the integrity and resiliency of rare plant communities through site specific management, stewardship and education.

Highland Domes Geographic Area

The phrase “The land of granite walls and waterfalls” captures directly what this region means to the climbing community. Many climbers regard The Highland Domes Geographic Area as a little Yosemite, nestled in the Appalachians. This Geographic Area is certainly a special and significant southeastern climbing region in large part because it offers climbers some of the tallest unbroken cliff faces in the Eastern United States. Whiteside Mountain, for example, is nationally renowned for its climbing history and many long, adventurous climbing routes. Some of these routes may take a full day to complete, and in a few instances have taken even longer. This area also offers outstanding ice climbing, a noteworthy example being on the north side of Whiteside Mountain; ice climbers travel from all over the South to try these winter routes when conditions are right. Due to its proximity to South Carolina and Georgia, this area also serves a significant portion of the climbing community outside of North Carolina, local climbers and out-of-town climbing visitors.

We acknowledge and appreciate incorporation of climbing in this section, especially in the Connecting people to the land and unique features management portions. We would like to make the following recommendations for additions or changes:

Description of the area

A minor, technical note, but the “300-foot cliffs” mentioned in the first sentence is partially incorrect, since many of the cliffs in this GA are much taller. Recommend replacing with *“cliffs and high granitic domes many hundreds of feet tall.”*

Mention of non-water based recreation examples is needed in the landscape overview of first paragraph:

“The steep forested mountains, coves and soaring granite cliffs provide outstanding opportunities for hiking, horseback riding, mountain biking and climbing.”

Make an addition to the non-Forest landmarks list.

Add the ‘Laurel Knob Cliff and Climbing Area’, owned and managed by Carolina Climbers Coalition, under ‘Landmarks within the geographic area that are not managed by the Forest Service’ list. Laurel Knob is the tallest unbroken cliff face in the Eastern U.S., an outstanding example of the granitic domes characteristic of this region, and a significant climbing site managed for the public. It is accessed from the Forest’s Panthertown Valley access point.

Connecting people to the land

Goals: Enhancing and restoring resiliency

Add new goal f) to cover peregrine falcon protection; remove from a) under Connecting people to the land:

f) Continue to support conservation and protection of peregrine falcons through monitoring, seasonal closure orders on rock faces, and collaboration with the climbing and recreation community.

Goals: Connecting people to the land

Add new goal a)

Maintain and enhance access to the region's outstanding recreational opportunities for horseback riding, climbing, fishing, hiking, hunting, mountain biking, scenic viewing, rock hounding, wildlife viewing, whitewater boating and other sustainable recreation activities.

Add new goal related to the need to address erosion and mitigate impacts on and to recreational resources that are not part of the Forest's designated sites or trails.

Maintain and restore access and sustainability for recreational resources that are not serviced by designated transportation systems or trail networks through activities such as erosion control and education.

Goals: Places within the area that will be managed in consideration of their unique features

Add to first bullet point under Panthertown a)--or consider removing given mention above in Connecting People to the Land

Maintain and enhance recreation experiences for visitors engaged in sightseeing, hiking, horseback riding, fishing, climbing and other sustainable recreational activities.

Goals: Opportunities to partner with others

Change f) to be consistent with similar management goal in Eastern Escarpment and Pisgah Ledge:

(d) Work with recreation groups to maintain the integrity and resiliency of rare plant communities through site specific management, stewardship and education.

CLIMBING IN WILDERNESS

The climbing community is deeply connected to wild places and relies on conservation of these landscapes to climb. By celebrating this connection, we help create the next generation of conservationists.

CLIMBERS HAVE PLAYED A CRITICAL ROLE IN WILDERNESS AND CONSERVATION HISTORY

JOHN MUIR

In the late 1800s, pioneer climber and second American Alpine Club president John Muir fought for the conservation of America's wild places, and was a key player in establishing the National Park system.



DAVID BROWER

Prolific climber David Brower was instrumental in the 1964 signing of the Wilderness Act while he was the Executive Director of the Sierra Club.



YVON CHOUINARD

Yvon Chouinard, groundbreaking climber and founder of Patagonia, helped develop environmentally friendly climbing techniques and gear. A dedicated conservationist, Chouinard has helped conserve many of America's wild places.



DID YOU KNOW?

David Brower placed, what is believed to be the first climbing bolt in the US, in 1938.

THE WILDERNESS CLIMBING LANDSCAPE

WHICH FEDERAL AGENCIES MANAGE WILDERNESS CLIMBING?*



WHERE ARE WILDERNESS CLIMBING AREAS?



FIXED ANCHORS

Climbing equipment left in place to allow safe ascent or descent of technical terrain.

THE WILDERNESS CLIMBING ETHIC



All climbers are encouraged to follow the Wilderness climbing ethic:

1. Be respectful. It is a privilege to climb in these beautiful, wild places.
2. Be aware of and respect wilderness climbing regulations, restrictions, and closures.
3. Use removable climbing protection whenever possible.
4. Get appropriate authorizations from land managers before placing a fixed anchor.
5. Understand that bolts are used as a last resort and must be placed by hand.
6. Tread lightly to minimize impacts. Adopt Leave No Trace principles and climbing practices.

BEST PRACTICES IN WILDERNESS CLIMBING MANAGEMENT



1. Know the land agency guidelines. The government has recognized climbing as an appropriate activity in our nation's Wilderness and acknowledges that fixed anchors are sometimes necessary tools for Wilderness climbing.
2. Involve the public. Stakeholder input is critical in managing safe climbing environments.
3. Recognize the importance of maintenance. Climbers should be allowed to maintain the safety of existing anchors in accordance with agency guidelines.
4. Allow provisions for emergencies. Climbers must have some level of control to make critical decisions regarding fixed anchor placements, where no other options are available.
5. Broadly publicize any changes. Publicize changes to land anchors, climbing regulations, and cliff closures to increase compliance and avoid compromising climber safety.

THE NATIONAL PARK SERVICE OFFICIALLY LEGITIMIZED WILDERNESS CLIMBING IN 2013.

"Climbing is a legitimate and appropriate use of wilderness."
— National Park Service Director's Order #40, Section 72, 2013



OUTDOOR ALLIANCE

* Based on all climbing sites in Mountain Project's US database.
† Based on National Park Service data and all climbing sites in Mountain Project's US database.

Photos (clockwise from top left): American Mountain Club Library; Photo of Brower by PHD/PHD/PHD; Photo of Chouinard by Neil Entwistle.