

**Stakeholders Forum for the Nantahala & Pisgah Plan Revision**  
**Code of Conduct**  
*Approved September 23, 2015 and Updated October 22, 2015 and April 12, 2016*

**A member of the Stakeholders Forum will:**

1. *Serve as a liaison between your constituency and the Stakeholders Forum.*
  - a. In order for the Stakeholders Forum to function effectively the total number of members must be limited. There's an important need, therefore, for members to communicate with their constituencies about what is happening and to bring additional concerns and ideas back to the Stakeholders Forum. The goal is ensure there are no surprises in the community or amongst members of the Stakeholders Forum, and also to prevent missteps by the Stakeholders Forum.
  - b. The Stakeholders Forum will identify key messages to support consistent communication amongst its members, and will strive for transparency.
  
2. *Strive for consensus. Decisions on recommendations will be made by consensus* of all named Stakeholders Forum members. Consensus means the willingness to go along with the decision either in active support of it or in not opposing it.
  - a. Stakeholders Forum members commit to work together collaboratively to develop recommendations related to the issues being addressed within the Stakeholders Forum. Collaboration is the good-faith effort of diverse stakeholders to share information, learn about each other's values and priorities, and develop win-win solutions that can be advanced with mutual support by all members. Stakeholders Forum members will respect the legitimacy of all other members' goals, and will strive to ensure that all members' interests are reflected in group decisions.
  - b. Members will be asked to show their support level for proposals in the following way:
    - Thumb up for full support of the proposal
    - Thumb to the side for "can live with" the proposal
    - Thumb down for "cannot live with" the proposal
  - c. Tentative agreements may be made at meetings pending the opportunity for members to consult with their constituencies. This will be done on a timely basis.
  - d. The commitment to work for consensus means that members will:
    - Participate in the give and take of the process in a way that seeks to understand the interests of all;
    - Generate proposals thought to be workable for all; and,
    - Work together to reach consensus.
  - e. If the Stakeholders Forum is in general agreement on an issue, dissenting members are responsible for proposing alternatives they believe might achieve group consensus.
  - f. The Stakeholders Forum will use "trial balloon" proposals to help reach final consensus recommendations. A trial balloon is defined as an informal, preliminary proposal, developed by a group of Stakeholders Forum members representing a diversity of interests. Trial balloons should, to the extent possible, be inclusive of other members' interests and should be focused on mutual gains, and proponents of a proposal commit that they will remain open to modifications or alternatives developed in the Forum.

Trial balloons will not become part of the Stakeholders Forum’s recommendations unless and until adopted by the full Stakeholders Forum.

3. *Maintain a respectful and productive working climate.*
  - a. Attend all meetings of the Stakeholders Forum and assigned committees;
  - b. Come prepared and actively participate to reach consensus;
  - c. Respect other Forum members and seek to understand their interests, attempting to “walk in their shoes;”
  - d. Speak honestly and work to resolve differences in a constructive manner;
  - e. Actively generate proposals thought to be workable for all;
  - f. Assume good intentions from others;
  - g. Ask clarifying questions;
  - h. Follow through with your commitments and schedules.
  
4. *Engage with your members, the general public and the media in a way that supports the process and decisions of the Stakeholders Forum.* Forum members who speak to the news media or participate in other forums such as online blogs must clarify that they speak only as an individual or for their organization and not on behalf of the Stakeholders Forum, unless designated to speak on behalf of the Forum.

Members are expected to use language that fosters positive interactions and forward progress, and members will not negatively characterize the Stakeholders Forum members, alternates, or represented organizations in the media. Forum members may share draft documents as long as they are clearly marked as draft, with the understanding that they will not be finalized until agreement by the full Forum.

5. *Support agreements of the Stakeholders Forum.* When the Stakeholders Forum reaches agreement on recommendations, members commit to honor and support those agreements with each other, within interest-based constituencies, with external publics, with the Forest Service, and in the media.

Until the Stakeholders Forum reaches agreement, members may advocate for their interests as individuals or on behalf of their organizations, including submitting comments to the Forest Service; however, members agree not to advocate or send comments that are incompatible with agreements made by the Stakeholders Forum or in a way that would prevent them from participating fully and in good faith in the Stakeholders Forum’s efforts to build mutual support for each other’s values and priorities. In other words, members may advocate positively for their own priorities, but they are expected not to advocate negatively against the legitimacy of other members’ priorities. If the Stakeholders Forum has not reached agreement in an area but is working toward it, members commit to honoring the process and maintaining open and honest discussions throughout.

Stakeholders Forum members commit to asking questions, increasing mutual understanding wherever possible, considering the power of perception, and working toward “win-win” agreements within the Stakeholders Forum.

**The National Forests in North Carolina will:**

1. *Share information and issue expertise* with the Stakeholders Forum during meetings. This will likely include regular updates on the plan revision process and timeline, as well as subject matter expertise on specific planning issues as appropriate.
2. *Identify and clearly state sideboards and constraints* within which the Stakeholders Forum should identify its recommendations. If Stakeholders Forum discussions move outside of the identified sideboards and constraints, raise red flags as appropriate. (Sideboards and constraints relate to legal requirements, fiscal limitations, and practical considerations.)
3. *Actively attend meetings and provide consistent participation* in the Stakeholders Forum discussions.

**The National Forest Foundation will:**

1. *Serve as neutral facilitator during meetings* by focusing the energy of the group on a common task, protecting individuals and their ideas from attack, encouraging everyone to participate and share their ideas, helping the group find zones of agreement, coordinating pre- and post-meeting logistics; and, where necessary, communicating with the members between meetings.
2. *Maintain the code of conduct agreed to by the member* and address the issue if a member is not acting in good faith and is inhibiting the group from moving forward.
3. *Respect the confidentiality of private communications* with any of the members.
4. *Prepare and document an objective record of the process and bring draft records back to the Stakeholders Forum for acceptance prior to distribution*, including areas of agreement, disagreement, strategies and recommendations. The NFF will maintain a website presence for the Stakeholders Forum.

**Addendum to the Code of Conduct**

*Approved October 22, 2015*

**Observers**

Meetings of the Stakeholders Forum for the Nantahala & Pisgah Plan Revision are open to observers. All persons attending meetings who are not Stakeholders Forum members are considered observers. Observers are requested to:

- Refrain from speaking when the meeting is in session, unless public comment times are specifically designated on the agenda;
- Listen respectfully and with an open mind;
- Appreciate the variety of perspectives represented in the Stakeholders Forum;

- Recognize the effort members of the Stakeholders Forum are putting forth in order to identify a zone of agreement around issues of conflict;
- Understand that much discussion is required prior to reaching agreement, and that the Stakeholders Forum is striving for consensus.

### **Alternates**

- As per the Code of Conduct, members are expected to participate in all meetings, but the Stakeholders Forum recognizes that occasionally an absence cannot be avoided. The Stakeholders Forum decided that alternates may attend meetings in place of designated members of the Stakeholders Forum if:
  - The member informs the NFF in advance of the name and contact information of the alternate;
  - The alternate agrees to the Code of Conduct and Purpose & Goals of the Stakeholders Forum;
  - The member fully prepares the alternate with background information on the Stakeholders Forum so that time will not be required in the meeting to bring the alternate “up to speed” and the process can continue to move forward as efficiently as possible.
- Some groups may opt to bring a designated alternate to every meeting, and they will communicate with the NFF in advance of each meeting to alert them to the alternate’s attendance;
- Alternates who attend with the member will not sit at the collaborative table and will be treated as observers;
- Alternates who attend a meeting in place of the member will sit at the collaborative table and will have all of the responsibilities of a member, including voting rights.
- Proxy voting will not be allowed.

### **Shared Seat**

The North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission will hold a shared seat on the Stakeholders Forum (held by two members, with one vote). The two people holding the shared seat will sit next to each other at the collaborative table.

Other requests for a shared seat will be handled by the Stakeholders Forum on a case-by-case basis.

### **External Communications**

Information about the Stakeholders Forum will be made available to external stakeholders via the website and other venues as appropriate; all efforts will be taken to ensure that the group’s work remains transparent to external audiences.

Media inquiries regarding the Stakeholders Forum will be directed to the NFF unless otherwise decided by a decision of the Stakeholders Forum. The NFF will communicate with the media regarding the collaborative process and will share documents and information about consensus decisions made by the Stakeholders Forum.

The Stakeholders Forum may decide to develop a specific plan for interacting with media representatives. Members of the Stakeholders Forum will communicate with the media in accordance

with any communication plans determined by the group. Until a communications plan is developed, media inquiries should be directed to the NFF.

### **Internal communications**

- A member email list will be used for ongoing communication.
- A website will be maintained for storing and sharing of final documents and available resources.

### **Code of Conduct Violations**

All Stakeholders Forum members commit to the responsibilities and good faith intentions outlined in the Code of Conduct. Given the accelerated timeline the Stakeholders Forum is operating under, the hope and expectation is that this section of the Code of Conduct is unnecessary. If needed, however, a member or members of the Stakeholders Forum may bring a concern about a violation of the Code of Conduct to the attention of the NFF in order to seek resolution. The NFF will then bring it forward to the full Stakeholders Forum for consideration and discussion of consequences. Consequences for violating the Code of Conduct may include:

- Apology to the Stakeholders Forum in an effort to repair trust;
- Requirement that misinformation communicated to external audiences be corrected;
- Temporary withdrawal of voting privileges;
- Removal from the Stakeholders Forum;
- Other.

If a violation is identified, it will be raised at a meeting and then the response or consequences will be decided at the following meeting of the Stakeholder Forum. The recommended consequences for violation of the Code of Conduct will be made by consensus amongst the members with the exception of the person in violation. If a decision for removal is approved, the Stakeholder Forum will evaluate the need to replace the stakeholder's interest or organization.