



# Defining Nantahala and Pisgah NFs' Sustainable Recreation Strategy



*Nantahala and Pisgah NFs' Stakeholders Forum Meeting  
November 2015*

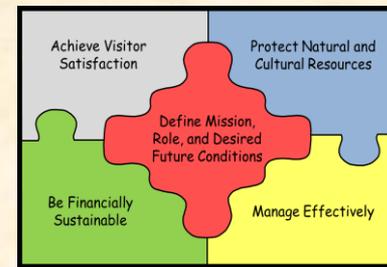
# Defining Nantahala and Pisgah NFs' Sustainable Recreation Strategy

## Session Goals



1. Considering other public lands
2. N & P NFs' visitation and opportunities
3. Sustainable Recreation Definition and Need
4. National/regional guidance and “sideboards”
5. Implementing the 2012 Planning Rule
6. Focusing the concepts

## Q&As



# What's the outdoor recreation availability in the broader landscape?

## National Park Service

Blue Ridge Parkway  
Great Smoky Mountains National Park  
Appalachian National Scenic Trail  
Overmountain Victory National Historic Trail  
Carl Sandburg National Historic Site (nearby)

## USDA Forest Service

Nantahala National Forest in NC  
Pisgah National Forest in NC  
Cherokee National Forest in TN (sharing boundaries with N&P NFs)  
Chattahoochee National Forest in GA, in close proximity to southwestern NC

## State of North Carolina

### Division of Parks and Recreation

State Parks including Grandfather Mountain, Mt. Mitchell, Chimney Rock, etc.  
Mountains-to-the-Sea State Trail (a/k/a/ National Recreation Trail)

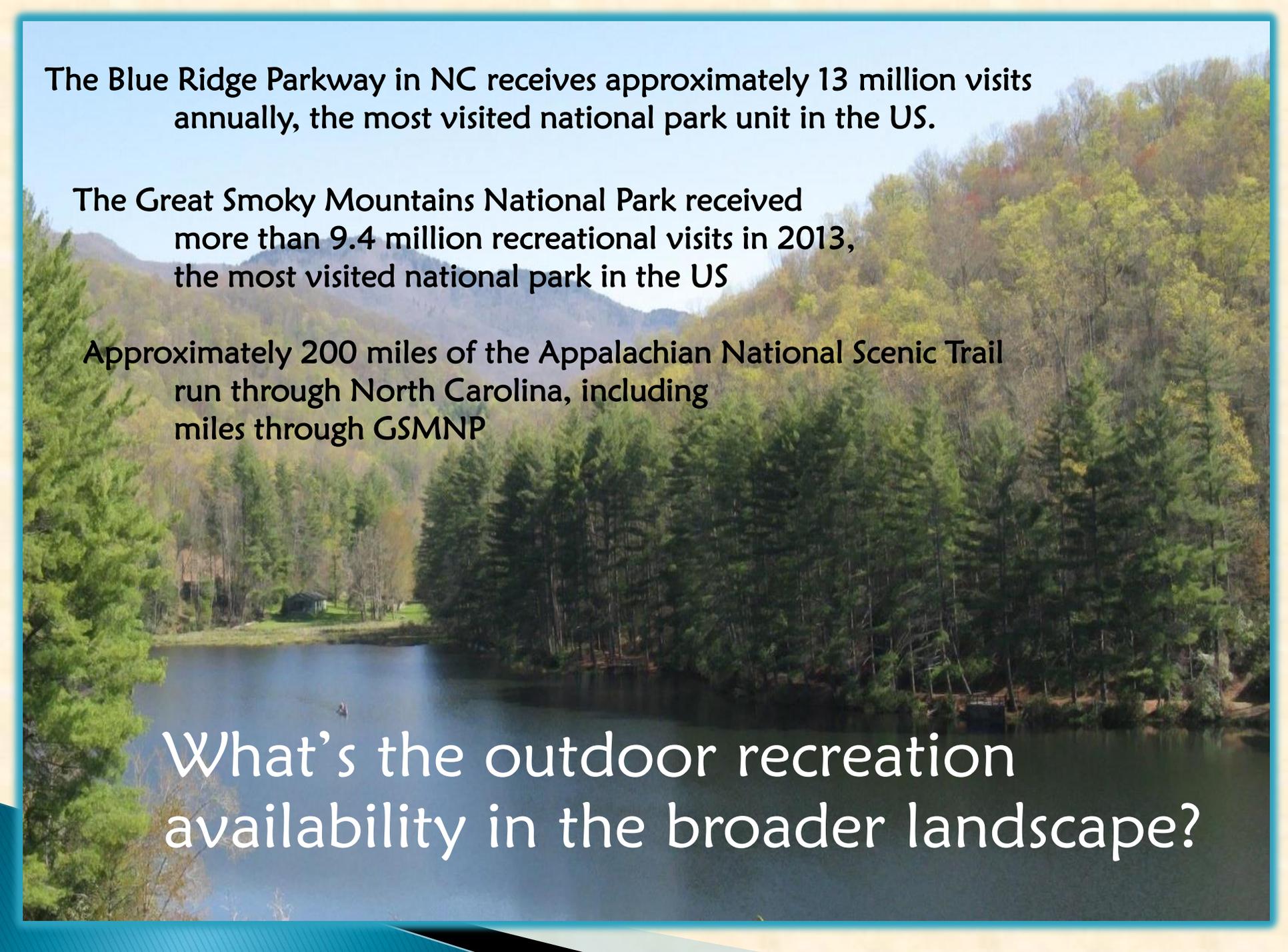
### Division of Forest Resources

DuPont State Forest  
Tuttle State Educational Forest

**Wildlife Resources Agency**, who administers hunting, fishing and trapping regulations on publically owned lands in the state

**Parks, Forests and Wildlife Commissions in adjacent states of Tennessee, Georgia, Virginia**



A scenic view of a lake surrounded by dense green forests and mountains in the background. The lake is calm, reflecting the surrounding greenery. In the distance, there are rolling hills and mountains under a clear blue sky. The foreground is dominated by tall, dark green evergreen trees, while the middle ground shows a mix of evergreens and deciduous trees with some yellowing leaves, suggesting an early autumn setting. A small boat is visible on the water in the middle distance.

**The Blue Ridge Parkway in NC receives approximately 13 million visits annually, the most visited national park unit in the US.**

**The Great Smoky Mountains National Park received more than 9.4 million recreational visits in 2013, the most visited national park in the US**

**Approximately 200 miles of the Appalachian National Scenic Trail run through North Carolina, including miles through GSMNP**

**What's the outdoor recreation availability in the broader landscape?**



# Nantahala and Pisgah National Forests :

- visited by >4,000,000 people annually
- among the top five most visited forests in the nation

(2013 NVUM)

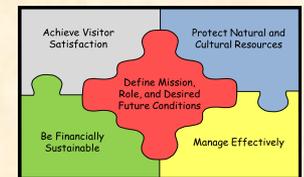
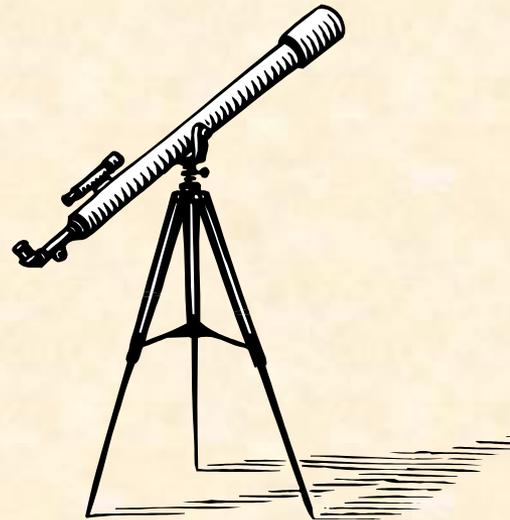
# Recreation Emphasis Areas (Niches)

- Sightseeing (driving for pleasure; viewing scenery, including waterfalls)
- Water-based Recreation (including motorized and non-motorized boating; swimming and other waterplay activities)
- Non-motorized Trails for hiking, mountain biking and pack-and-saddle
  - Motorized Trail complexes
  - Remote backcountry experiences
  - Hunting and Fishing
  - Conservation Education



# Why Do We Need a Strategy?

- ▶ The U.S. Forest Service is the largest, most diverse provider of recreation opportunities in the world.
- ▶ Everyone's idea of recreation is different.
- ▶ With growing and diversifying demands for recreation, the Forest Service, alone, cannot continue to meet the need.



# We have the opportunity to develop a different management approach...

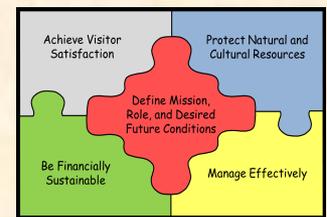
....from trying to expand services and facilities to fulfill everyone's desires and interests, everywhere

...to collaborating with others to deliver sustainable opportunities.



more

s u s t a i n a b l e



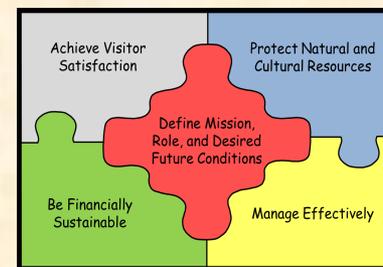
# SUSTAINABLE RECREATION:

“The set of recreation settings and opportunities on the National Forest System that is

- ecologically,
- economically, and
- socially

sustainable for present and future generations.”

FSH 1909.12



# Why the need for Sustainable Recreation?



## Benefits of Outdoor Recreation

- Healthy lifestyles
- Memorable experiences
- Beautiful and unique settings
- Stress reduction
- Important cultural connections
- Citizen stewardship
- Creative and spiritual renewal

## Who We Serve

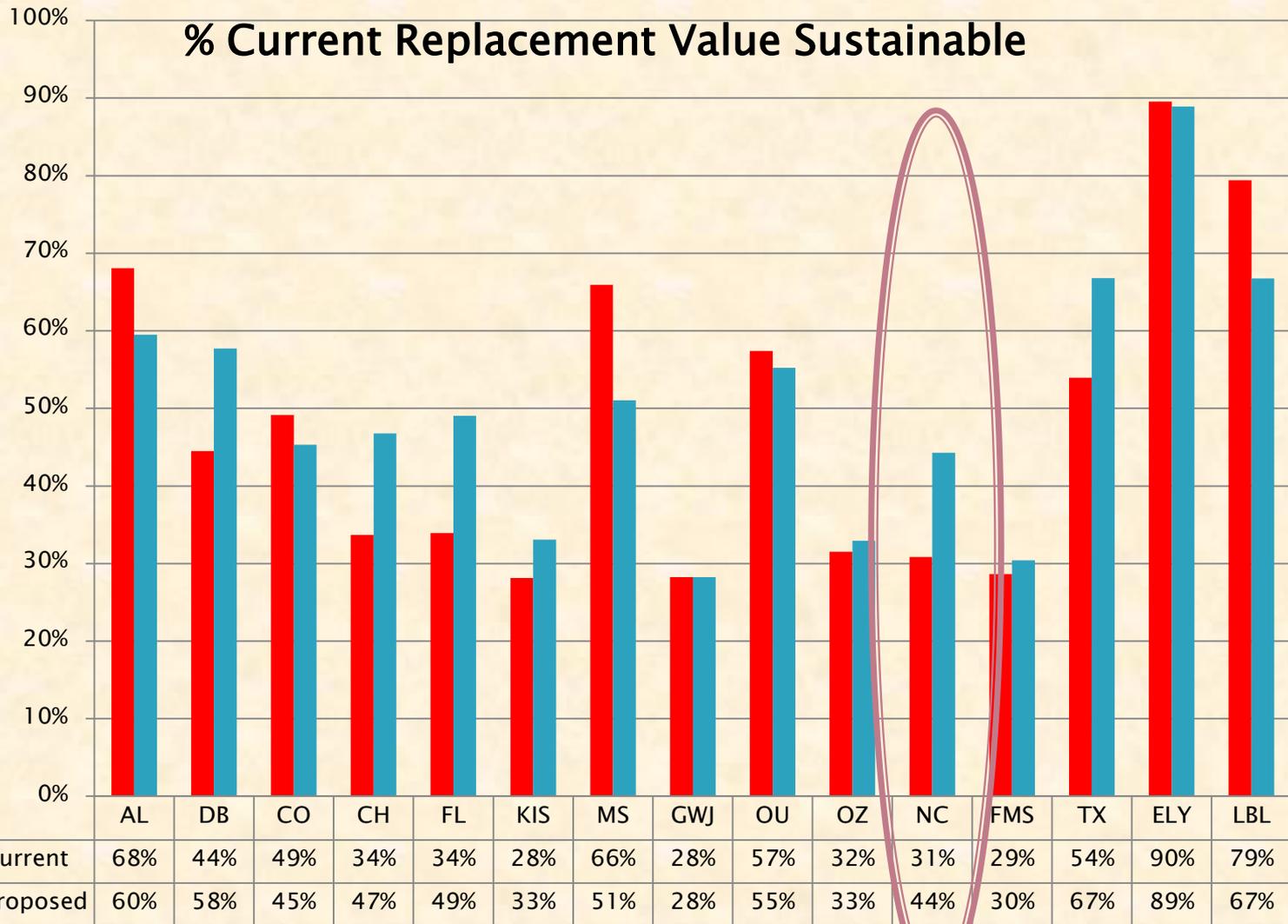
- 4 million people or more every year
- Changing population demographics
- More sophisticated user groups

## A Changing World

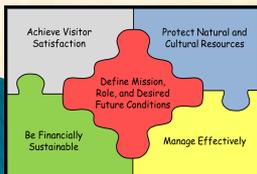
- Private land development
- Climate change
- Increased focus on tourism
- Changing technology (e-bikes, cell phones, apps, interactive maps)
- Changing user preferences (group/guided activities)

## Trends & Issues

- Only 40% recreation sites are sustainable
- 1/4 of trails managed to standard
- Increase in unmanaged use (user created trails and sites)
- Lost volunteer and partnership opportunities
- Increased user conflicts and safety concerns
- Decreased road maintenance



# R8 Recreation Sites Financial Framework

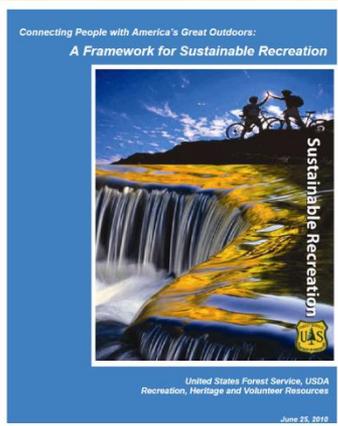


# How is the Forest Service guiding a Sustainable Recreation Strategy?



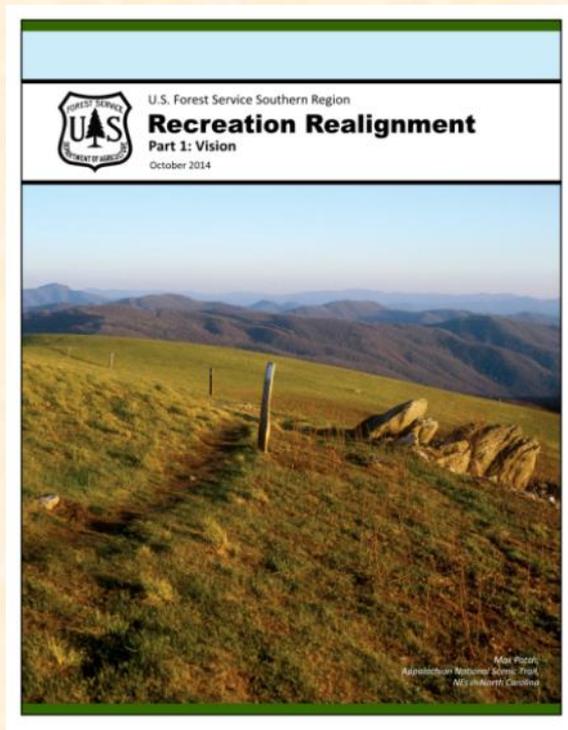
## Framework for Sustainable Recreation

- Strategic planning document
- Identifies six guiding principles
  - Connecting people with their heritage
  - Outdoor recreational activity promotes healthy lifestyles
  - Sustainability underlies all program decisions
  - Community engagement is essential
  - National Forest lands are part of a larger landscape
  - The Recreation program is integrated into the larger agency mission
- Focuses on three spheres that frame sustainability – environmental, social and economic



# How is the Forest Service guiding a Sustainable Recreation Strategy?

## Southern Region's Sustainable Recreation Strategy

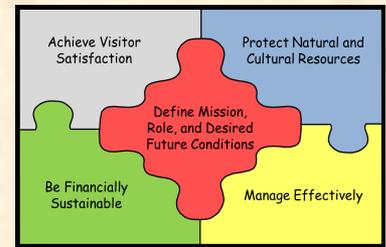


“Vision 2020” sets out...

### ➤ Seven Focus Areas

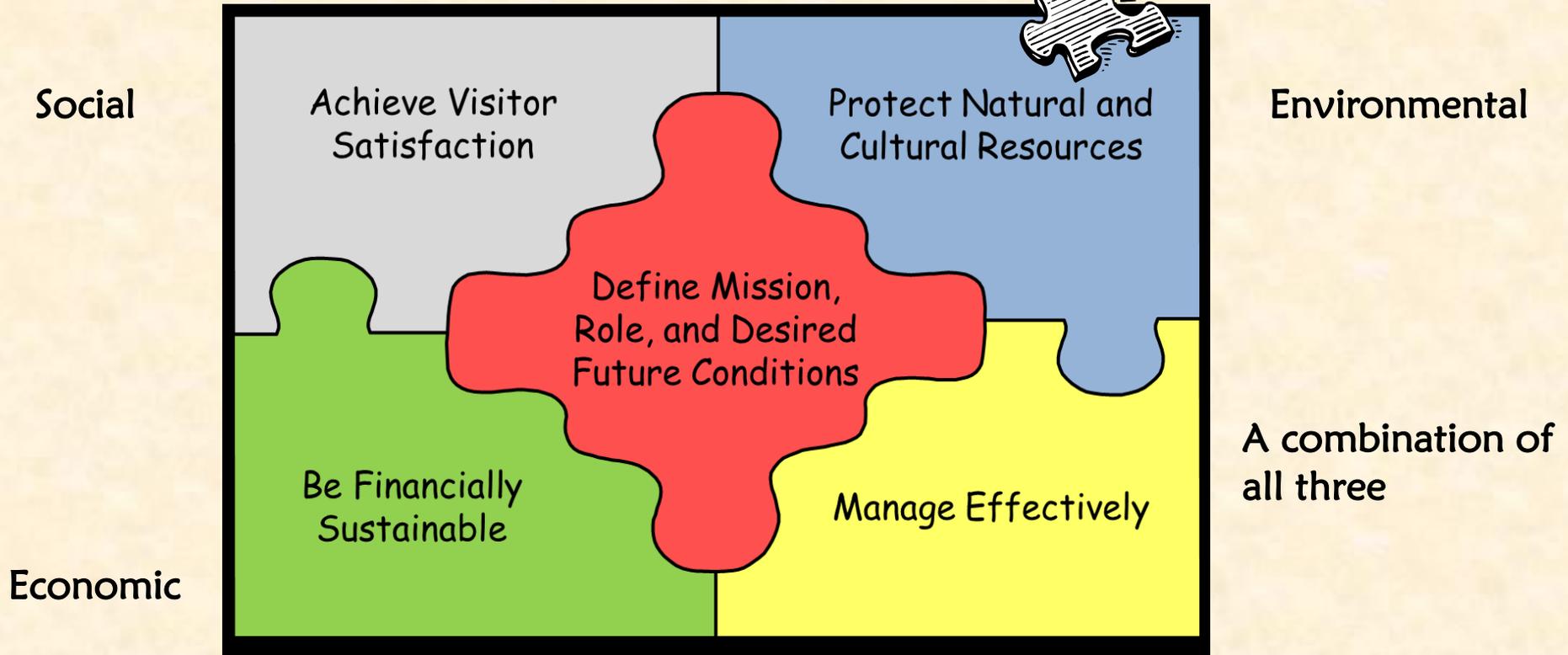
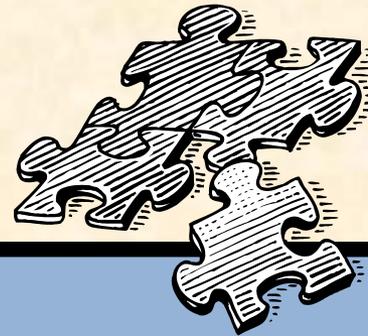
- ✓ Collaborative planning
- ✓ Trails
- ✓ Developed sites
- ✓ Project decision making
- ✓ Skills and capacity
- ✓ Budget allocation, and
- ✓ Performance tracking

➤ Tied to Long Term Desired Outcomes by Critical Success Factors



How is the Forest Service guiding a Sustainable Recreation Strategy?

# The Southern Region's Critical Success Factors



*We are proposing these as “the Sideboards”  
for N&P NFs’ Sustainable Recreation Program*

# The Southern Region's Critical Success Factors

## ACHIEVE VISITOR SATISFACTION

- Understand public's values
- Provide high quality experience
- Serve diverse publics
- Provide visitor information and education
- Provide access to persons with disabilities
- Enforce laws and regulations
- Meet agency standards for safety and quality assurance

## DEFINE ROLE and DESIRED FUTURE CONDITIONS

MISSION – Why we provide recreation  
ROLE – Our distinctive contributions relative to other providers  
DESIRED FUTURE CONDITIONS – The mix of opportunities and settings to be provided

### Determined through:

- Forest planning
- Mid-level collaborative planning

## PROTECT NATURAL AND CULTURAL RESOURCES

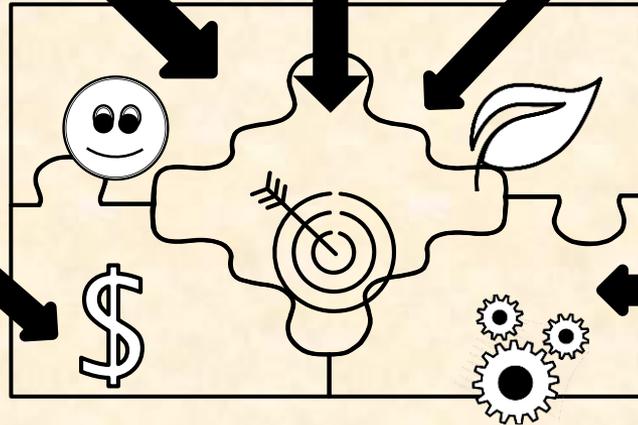
- Comply with applicable laws, regulations, and policies
- Reduce impacts from unmanaged recreation
- Protect scenic values
- Promote "green" operations
- Encourage recreation user ethics and environmental stewardship through education and service

## BE FINANCIALLY SUSTAINABLE

- Use mosaic of funding sources and relationships to build long-term financial capacity
- Use sound financial analysis to understand long-term financial implications of decisions
- Establish protocols for balancing program demands with available financial resources

## MANAGE EFFECTIVELY

- Budget and performance
- Staffing and skills
- Volunteer and Service Programs
- Partnerships
- Private Providers (concessions, permits)
- Inventories and surveys
- Contract/grant/permit administration
- Adherence to applicable laws, regulations, and policies
- Effective processes and procedures



*The "Sideboards" for a Sustainable Recreation Program*

# The 2012 Planning Rule

requires that a plan include plan components

**To provide for sustainable recreation;** including recreation settings, opportunities, and access; and scenic character.

**To consider**

- settings, opportunities, trails and appropriate placement/ sustainable management of recreational facilities
- public preferences or demand in the broader landscape\* and the plan area and the compatibility of recreational uses
- the compatibility of different recreational uses in specific areas within the plan area
- how recreational uses will influence ecological conditions

**To develop components**

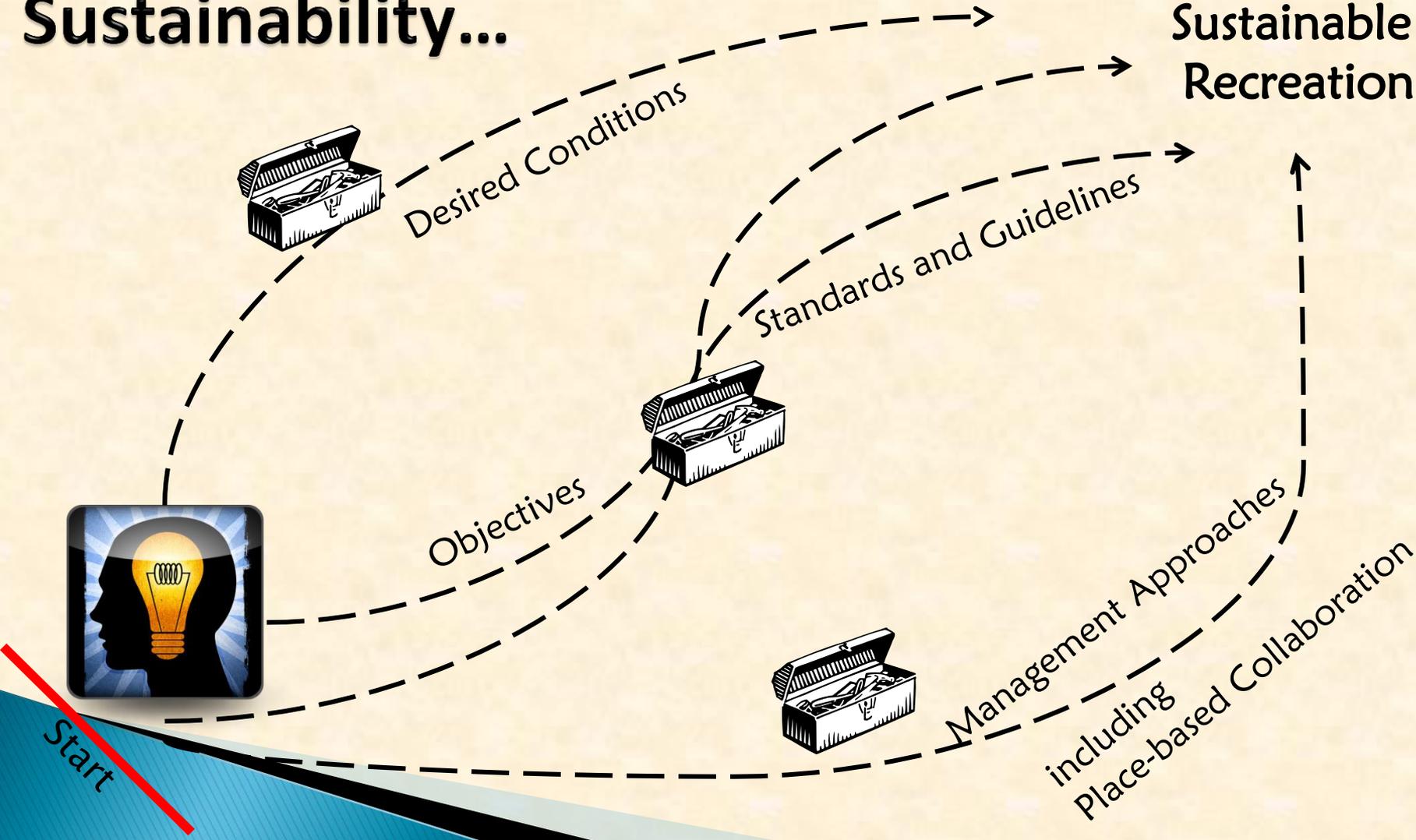
- within the inherent capability of the land [Ecological]
- fiscal capability of the unit (recognizing the contributions of partnerships) [Financial/economic]
- taking into account opportunities to connect people with nature [Social]



# Developing Forest Plan Components that contribute to Sustainability...



Sustainable Recreation



Start

Desired Conditions

Objectives

Standards and Guidelines

Management Approaches  
including  
Place-based Collaboration

# A sample of draft Desired Conditions for Recreation

## Recreation Settings

- Forest settings reflect **healthy and resilient landscapes**, providing a **diverse sense of place** for community residents and visitors and enhancing **high quality sustainable recreation opportunities**.
- A **full range of recreation settings are available**, ranging from primitive, unroaded and challenging backcountry areas to roaded settings easily travelled and convenient for connecting communities to the forest.

## Opportunities

- **Risk is appropriately managed** at developed sites, based on development scale and resources.
- **Accurate high quality visitor information** is available through **multiple sources**, including electronic media and on-site information boards, to enhance visitor safety and experiences.
- A **sustainable road and trail network provides access to large blocks of land** for hunting, fishing and other place-based recreation activities.



# A sample of draft Desired Conditions for Recreation, *continued*

## Concentrated Use Areas

- Concentrated Use Areas are **visually appealing, environmentally healthy, and well maintained** in developed or dispersed settings.
- Use areas are **capable of sustaining recreationists** while also **conserving the surrounding water, soil, vegetation and wildlife**.
- Limited rustic amenities and fewer signs are expected in **dispersed sites with low levels of development**.
- **Fisheries and wildlife habitat improvements and viewing opportunities** compliment developed sites.

## Trails

- An ecologically, socially, and economically **sustainable system of trails** provides **high quality recreation experiences** across a range of settings for each use-type.
- Sustainable trail use occurs **within the ability of the land to support it, with high visitor satisfaction, minimal conflict between users, and without impacts to ecologically sensitive areas**.
- **Partner groups and communities** are involved with and supportive of sustainable trail management efforts.



# How to integrate these concepts?

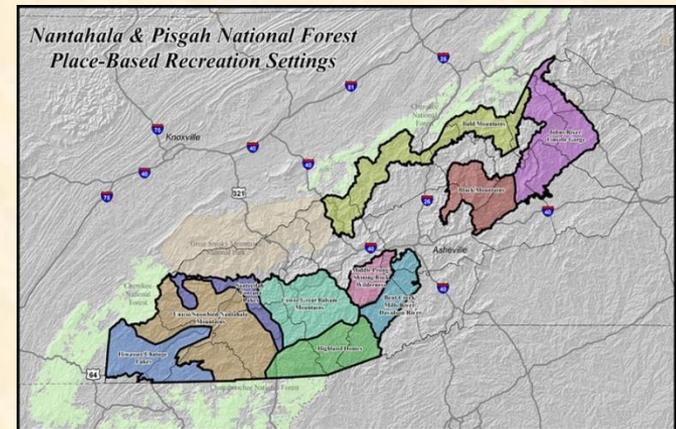
Niche + Setting + Collaboration + Sideboards (Critical Success Factors) = Sustainability

Is the national/regional recreation and planning direction sufficient to provide a focused approach?

We'd like to introduce the concept of and collaborative *Place-based Settings*, smaller units than the entire Nantahala and Pisgah NFs,

that can be used to

- focus on a geographically based place
- understand the
  - ✓ integration of resources
  - ✓ unique infrastructure and needs
  - ✓ interplay of communities
- help develop a long-range vision for an area



Existing and desired conditions of each place-based setting can be described by:

These help establish the NICHE emphasis

### ➤ Social Components

- Special or distinctive features, including special designations
- National or other well known trail complexes
- Heritage sites/cultural elements
- Recreation emphasis by activity and facilities
- Recreation Opportunity Spectrum
- Nearest communities

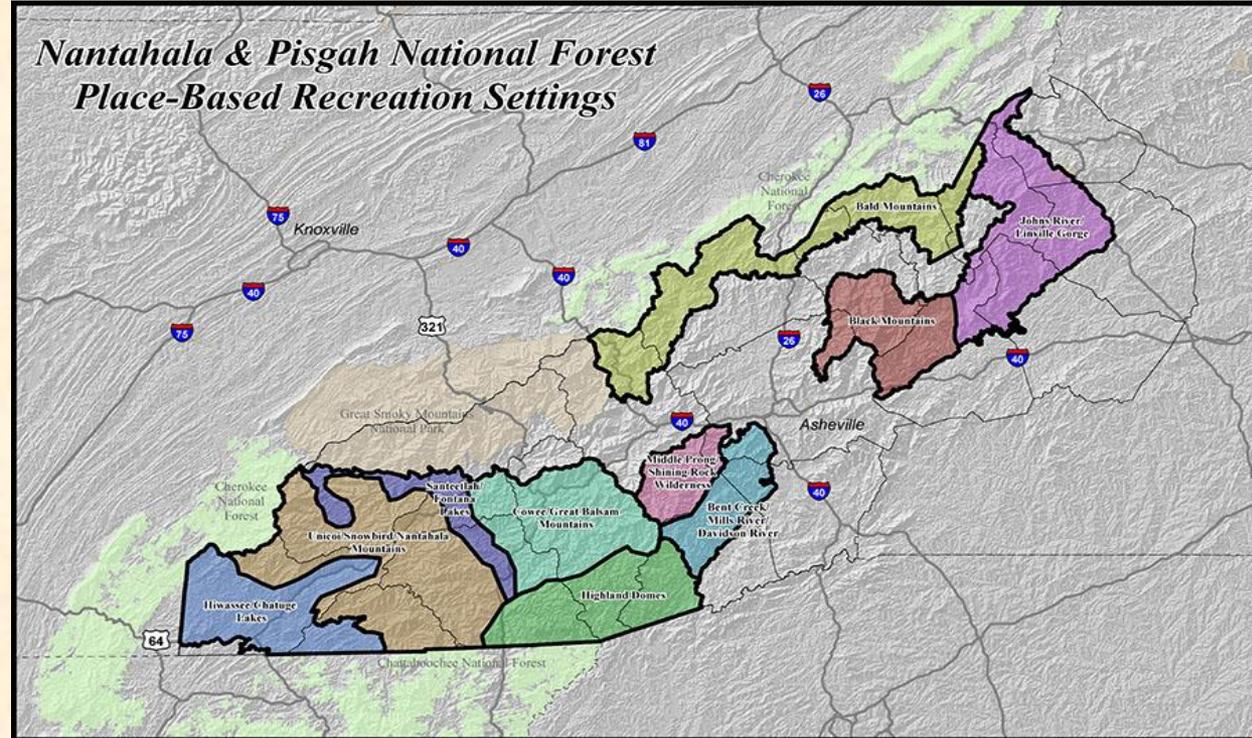
### ➤ Ecological Components

- General setting, landform
- Surface water characteristics
- Vegetation
- Wildlife

# Using Geographic Units as “Place-Based Settings” to conserve settings and focus on recreation priorities

## Ten Geographic Units

- Hiwassee/Chatuge Lakes
- Unicoi/Snowbird/  
Nantahala Mountains
- Santeetlah and Fontana Lakes
- Cowee and Great Balsam  
Mountains
- Highland Domes
- Davidson/North Mills Rivers
- Forks of the Pigeon River
- Bald/Unaka Mountains
- Black Mountains
- Johns River/Linville Gorge



Looking at the Forest in smaller pieces helps provide a sustainable recreation focus based on resources and existing facilities

This approach may better serve both the communities of place and communities of use, and increase collaboration between those groups

This approach also focuses on each area's unique niches



# Sample Poster for one of the “Place-based Recreation Settings” – the Black Mountains Area

## The Black Mountains Area

### Social Setting

40% front country, including Blue Ridge Parkway  
60% in remote settings (Wilderness, WSAs and Inventories Roadless Areas);

### Nearest towns

Burnsville  
Spruce Pine  
Marion  
Black Mountain

### Major Rivers

South Toe  
Cane  
Catawba

Recreation Emphasis	Activities	Destination Sites and Facilities supporting the emphasis
Non-Motorized Trails	Hiking       Pack and Saddle      Mountain Biking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Mountains to the Sea National Recreation Trail</li> <li>Mackey Mountain / Curtis Creek Trail Complex</li> <li>Old Fort / Catawba Falls Trail Complex</li> <li>Black Mountain Campground</li> <li>Briar Bottom Group Camp</li> <li>South Toe River Trail Complex</li> <li>Big Ivy / Big Butt Trail Complex</li> <li>Woods Mountain / Armstrong Creek Trail Complex</li> <li>Kitsuma/Point Lookout Trail Complex</li> </ul>
Sightseeing	Viewing Scenery (including Waterfalls); Picnicking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Waterfall trails including Catawba, Roaring Fork, Douglas, Walker Creek, Toms Creek</li> <li>Old Fort Picnic Area</li> <li>Green Knob Fire Tower</li> <li>Blue Ridge Parkway day use and camping facilities (Crabtree Meadows, Craggy Gardens)</li> <li>Mount Mitchell State Park</li> </ul>
Water-based Recreation	Fishing Wading and Tubing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Jarrett Creek accessible fishing pier</li> <li>Curtis Creek Campground</li> <li>Carolina Hemlocks Recreation Area</li> <li>South Toe accessible fishing pier</li> </ul>
Rockhounding	Mineral hunting and gold panning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ray Mine</li> </ul>
Hunting		

Peaks in the Black Mountains above 6300'

Include:  
Mt. Mitchell  
Mt. Craig  
Balsam Cone  
Catttail Peak  
Big Tom  
Mt. Gibbs  
Clingmans Peak  
Potato Hill  
Celo Knob  
Mt. Hallback  
Blackstock Knob

Scenic Waterfalls  
including  
Catawba  
Roaring Fork  
Douglas  
Walker Creek  
Toms Creek



# Sample Poster for one of the “Place-based Recreation Settings” – the Hiwassee and Chatuge Lakes Area

## The Hiwassee and Chatuge Lakes Area

### Social Setting

Large rivers and lakes provide settings for water-based activities. The area is easily accessed by a network of roads, and draws visitors from neighboring states. Several motorized boat launches provide easy access to the lakes for fishing, motor boating and other water sports.

### Nearest towns

Murphy  
Hayesville  
Andrews

### Major Rivers

Valley  
Hiwassee  
Nottely

### Large Lakes

Hiwassee  
Chatuge

### Small Lake

Cherokee



Recreation Emphasis	Activities	Destination Sites and Facilities supporting the emphasis
Water-based Recreation Sightseeing	Motorized boating and water sports Fishing Swimming/Wading Picnicking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Motorized boat launches: Hanging Dog, Jackrabbit Mountain, Ramsey Bend, Grape Creek</li> <li>Jackrabbit Mountain Recreation Area, including picnic pavilions</li> <li>Cherokee Lake Picnic Area, including its accessible fishing pier and picnic pavilion</li> <li>Hanging Dog day use facilities, including picnic pavilion</li> </ul>
Non-Motorized Trails	Mountain Biking Hiking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Jackrabbit Mountain Complex</li> <li>Hanging Dog Complex</li> </ul>
Hunting and Target Shooting	Target Shooting Range	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Panther Top Shooting Range</li> </ul>



Nantahala & Pisgah National Forest

Place-Based Recreation Settings

Going a step further...



# Place-based Settings

How can  
the differences and uniqueness  
of these geographic settings  
*help define*

Nantahala and Pisgah NFs'  
Sustainable Recreation Future?

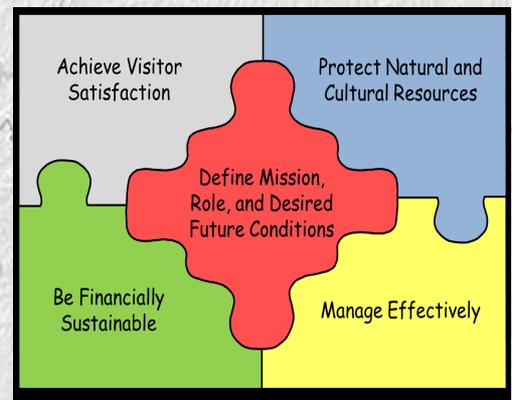
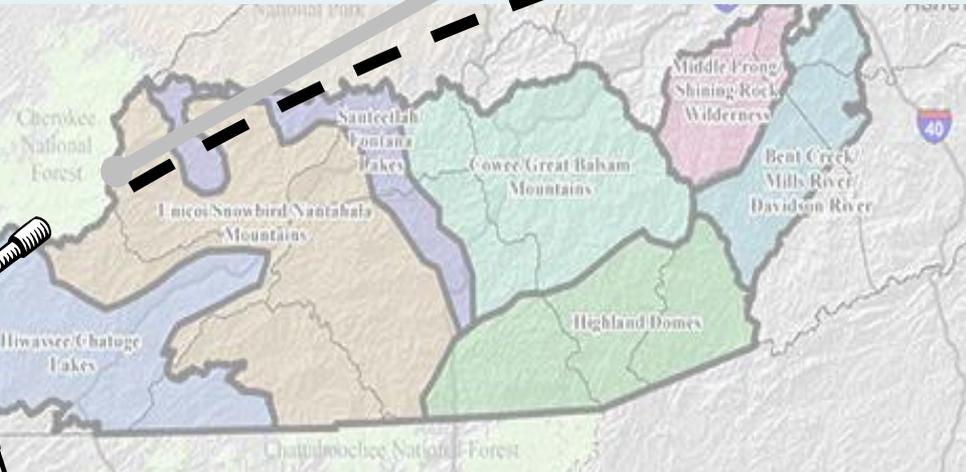
Niche + Setting + Collaboration + Sideboards (Critical Success Factors) = Sustainability

To transition to a sustainable program,

- focus the approach,
- collaborate with other providers and communities,
- and deliver sustainable opportunities
  - ✓ where they are best suited,
  - ✓ based on resources,
  - ✓ interest/use
  - ✓ infrastructure.

more

sustainable

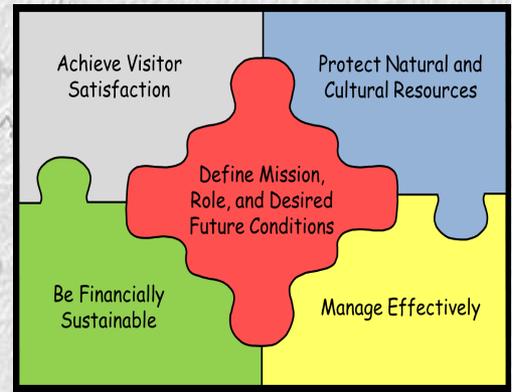


# Defining Nantahala and Pisgah NFs' Sustainable Recreation Strategy

Questions?  
Comments?

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sustainable





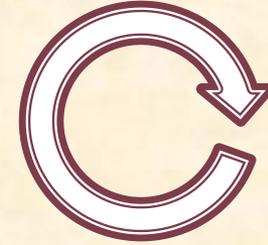




# Trends

- ▶ Deteriorating infrastructure
  - Roughly  $\frac{1}{2}$  of recreation sites are sustainable
  - Roughly  $\frac{1}{3}$  of trails to standard
  - By size – only top 100 sites are sustainable (1,800 total)
- ▶ Increased risk to resources (natural/cultural)
- ▶ Increased unmanaged use (user created trails and sites)
- ▶ Lost opportunities – V&S Program
- ▶ Mis”use” of volunteers / liabilities
- ▶ Unable to find/fulfill partner opportunity
- ▶ Increased user conflicts
- ▶ Increased safety concerns
- ▶ Very high employee stress

# A Changing World



- ▶ Budget
- ▶ Population demographics
- ▶ Private land development
- ▶ Disturbance events – climate change
- ▶ Increased focus on tourism
- ▶ Technology
  - Recreation industry (mountain bikes, e-bikes)
  - General (drones, cell phones)
  - Visitor information (apps, interactive maps)
- ▶ Changing User Preferences (group/guided activities)
- ▶ More sophisticated user groups
- ▶ Anti-Federal sentiment

