

**DISCUSSION AGENDA OF EASTERN ESCARPMENT GEOGRAPHIC AREA  
SMALL GROUP MEETING AGENDA**

**Wednesday, July 19, 2017 12:00 – 4:00pm 25 Library St., Mars Hill NC, 28754**

**The Meeting Outcomes:**

1. One or more proposals of mutual interests are developed and described for the geographic area (s) of focus and discussion (often around a How can we...while at the same time....)
2. Members are committed to work toward mutual understanding and refine proposals where possible that present opportunities for continued dialogue and areas of concern between now and .....
3. For proposals that result in a range of disagreements, request that other Forum members review and provide suggestions to help foster mutual gains.

**Resources Available:**

1. Please review the USFS map, description, and goals of the **EASTERN ESCARPMENT GA**:  
[www.fs.usda.gov/detail/nfsnc/home/?cid=fseprd491137](http://www.fs.usda.gov/detail/nfsnc/home/?cid=fseprd491137)
2. Review Eastern Escarpment Synopsis document (attached), summary of the June 6 Stakeholder Forum facilitated group discussions (narrative attached and the following pages specifically address the Eastern Escarpment GA: pgs: 1-2, 9-10, 16, 20-21).

**Attending:** Chris Coxe, Deirdre Lightsey, Hugh Irwin, Julie White, Ryan Jacobs, Kevin Colburn (phone), Jon Hallemeier, & Mary Lou Addor

**Group Exercise:** what interests are currently represented in the meeting?

**Interests in the room**

1. Recreational based interests
  - Horseback riding
  - Hiking, paddlers
  - Biking, climbers
  - Sustainable trails and maintenance
  - Hunters
  - Fishing
  - Camps
  - Outward bound
2. Special conservation areas
3. Wilderness
4. Other designated areas (scenic areas, special interest areas based on rare species and habitats)
5. Climate change/ adaptation
6. Wildlife corridors
7. Habitat restoration (ex. Spruce-fir restoration)
8. Land management
9. Forest health and protection
10. Ecological diversity (spectrum from old growth to early successional)
11. Deirdre, Hugh, and Julie are members of the Partnership; Ryan and Chris can speak for towards interests such as the Fish and Wildlife Conservation Council.

**Given this list, what interests are not present in the meeting?**

1. Economic development
  - Designated assets
  - Counties/local economies
2. Timber
  - Forest resources
  - Wood products
  - Non-timber forest products
3. Watershed planning interests

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**Areas of Agreement [full support from those in attendance]:**

1. **Restoring woodlands and native species composition in the low elevation pine, pine-oak heath, dry oak, and dry-mesic oak ecozones is a priority in the Eastern Escarpment**

**Group revised for full support:** Restoring woodlands and native species composition **and structure** in the low elevation pine, pine-oak heath, dry oak, and dry-mesic oak ecozones is a priority in the Eastern Escarpment

2. **The Eastern Escarpment is a priority for increasing equestrian and bicycle trail access**

**Group revised for full support:** The Eastern Escarpment is a priority for increasing equestrian and bicycle trail access **and appropriate access to those trails.**

3. **How can current assets like Boone Fork camp be reopened & maintained to address access needs while being mindful of the FS budget constraints?**

Proposal(s): Engage partners (BCH of Blue Ridge & NW area SORBA) to restore Boone Fork & use it for access.

**Group revised for full support:** Engage local partners (e.g., agencies, non -profits, private interests like BCH of Blue Ridge & NW area of SORBA) with specific interests in restoring, reopening, and maintaining site specific facilities like Boone Fork.

4. **How can recreation be managed while protecting streams from increased sedimentation? And Considering the close proximity of the Eastern Escarpment to major population centers, how can this area be best managed for the entire continuum of recreational activities?**

Proposal(s): (Note: what was area of discussion #4 and #5 were addressed by one proposed agreement as follows):

**Group revised for full support:** Develop plan for sustainable recreation to include expanded trail opportunities for all users and coordinated trail maintenance among user groups.

5. **Which areas within the Eastern Escarpment are most appropriate for protective designations?**

Proposal(s): **Group supports request** for review of Dobson Knob for placement in Backcountry (currently in Interface/Matrix).

Key Discussion Points for new placement in GA area:

- WRC mapped as potential BC (about a 4,000ac area)
- Extremely rugged territory
- Prime area for Carolina Hemlock.
- Very difficult area to manage as matrix interface.

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- Future staff may manage area based on desired conditions rather than its unique qualities if left in Interface/Matrix.
- Add to inventory areas in these two National Forests that are for the most part -unroaded - (can have temp roads for fire suppression and emergencies)
- Help Stakeholders understand, whether an area will be managed for early successional habitat or managed for old growth, that the project level communication is specific and clear. And if it deviates, that stakeholders understand why. Consider digital data inventory to serve as objective resource for all parties.

**Areas of Partial Discussion/Agreement, Second or New Proposals:**

1. **In Harper Creek and Lost Cove Wilderness Study Areas, how can permanent protection of the wild character of the areas be obtained while providing adequate bicycle and equestrian access and connectivity within the Wilson Creek Watershed?**

**Second Proposal:** Support for a Wilderness designation for Harper Creek and Lost Cove Wilderness Study areas only when multi-use routes which allow for mountain biking and equestrians have been established through portions of the area(s) that would provide connectivity for multi-use trails through the Wilson Creek area, or until such trails have been established such that affected user groups deem trails through Harper Creek and Lost Cove WSA's unnecessary. This agreement will be valid throughout the life of the Nantahala Pisgah Forest Plan currently being developed.

*[second proposal: needs discussion to determine level of support]*

First Proposal(s): main thrust was to consider current uses of hike, bike, horse, hunt, fish, emergency, and connectivity in designation of NRA or Big W. Hugh and Julie to complete **[DONE]**

2. **In areas identified as Interface and Matrix, how can *Old Growth and natural areas be protected while providing for adequate restoration for wildlife?* How can the viewshed of the Globe area be protected while still creating young forest habitat for wildlife? (Note: was item #3 and #8)**

**Third Proposal (Chris Coxen and Ryan Jacobs with comments from Hugh Irwin)**  
Chris: black letters, Ryan: red letters, Hugh: green letters

Hugh: mostly supports the wording addressing old growth occurring in Matrix and interface proposed by Chris and Ryan.

Exceptions: does not support reference to **“Restoration of structure will be in accordance with the forest-wide goals and desired conditions derived from NRV”**. There are problems in the assumptions and methodology used in the NRV model used by the Forest. These problems have been pointed out to planners, but the model nor desired conditions and goals have not been adjusted as far as I am aware. I would be fine with the statement without this reference:

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For the same reason, I can't support the **reference to goals and desired conditions derived from NRV in State Natural Areas** (note name adjustment). I also think that the natural community description in the "Guide to the Natural Communities of North Carolina" contains adequate information to guide restoration of both composition and structure. I would be ok with the statement with this reference omitted: **Restoration of structure will be in accordance with the forest-wide goals and desired conditions derived from NRV.**

I would be glad to discuss in more detail the problems with assumptions and methodology in the NRV model with anyone who wants to. Briefly, the NRV model was derived using Land Fire, which is a non-spatial modeling software. The assumptions and methodology used with this model led to some modeled natural disturbances being handled in ways that distort the model results. If corrections were made in the model, I could see it and desired conditions and goals potentially being used in the way proposed in these statements, but not in its current form.

**How to Deal with Natural Areas That Fall Outside the Lines  
Language Developed By Chris Coxen and Ryan Jacob**

Within identified old growth communities **occurring in Matrix or Interface:**

**Assess the need for** management activities **and permit only those activities which would** enhance or restore forest community composition **and structure. Restoration of composition will be in accordance with** the community type descriptions described in the Region 8 "Guidance for Conserving and Restoring Old-Growth Forest Communities on National Forests in the Southern Region" document. **Restoration of structure will be in accordance with the forest-wide goals and desired conditions derived from NRV** and the Region 8 "Guidance for Conserving and Restoring Old-Growth Forest Communities on National Forests in the Southern Region" document.

Within natural heritage areas **occurring in Matrix or Interface:**

**Assess the need for** management activities **and permit only those activities which would** enhance or restore the composition **and structure for which the natural area was designated. Restoration of composition will be in accordance with** the natural community description within the most recent "Guide to the Natural Communities of North Carolina" document. **Restoration of structure will be in accordance with the forest-wide goals and desired conditions derived from NRV.**

Utilizing partnerships to increase forest restoration: **(Hugh supports this statement)**

Based on Geographic Area Description and Goals, utilize collaborative partnership groups to identify, guide, and implement GA-specific habitat restoration projects to help reach restoration stretch goals. Utilize Good Neighbor authority to partner with the North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission and North Carolina Forest Service to increase restoration capacity. Utilize Stewardship Agreements with partners to increase restoration-based habitat management projects.

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Focus on increased implementation of prescribed fire as a habitat management tool across all seral stages (**Avoiding and or safeguarding natural** areas where fire will have deleterious effects on the native community composition): [COMMENT: Including the word natural here makes it sound like its only referring to “natural areas” as in state natural areas. I’m assuming the intent was to include all areas where fire would have negative impacts on the desired forest community type].

Increase the use of prescribed fire through both USFS **resources** and Good Neighbor authority **opportunities** to increase forest resiliency to catastrophic wildfires, protect wildland-urban interface, and restore/maintain fire-adapted ecosystems. Utilize prescribed fire in post-harvest and young forest (ESH) wildlife openings to maintain, enhance, and direct plant composition towards desired conditions.

**Second Proposal (Chris Coxen)**

*Within identified old growth communities:*

Exclude management activities that will not enhance or restore the forest community composition based on the community type descriptions described in the Region 8 "Guidance for Conserving and Restoring Old-Growth Forest Communities on National Forests in the Southern Region" document.

*Within natural heritage areas:*

Exclude management activities that will not enhance or restore the natural area composition based on the natural community description within the most recent "Guide to the Natural Communities of North Carolina" document.

*Utilizing partnerships to increase forest restoration:*

Based on Geographic Area Description and Goals, utilize collaborative partnership groups to identify, guide, and implement GA-specific habitat restoration projects to help reach restoration stretch goals. Utilize Good Neighbor authority to partner with the North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission and North Carolina Forest Service to increase restoration capacity. Utilize Stewardship Agreements with partners to increase restoration-based habitat management projects.

Focus on increased implementation of prescribed fire as a habitat management tool across all seral stages (excluding natural areas where fire will have deleterious effects on the native community composition):

Increase the use of prescribed fire through both USFS staff and Good Neighbor authority to increase forest resiliency to catastrophic wildfires, protect wildland-urban interface, and restore/maintain fire-adapted ecosystems. Utilize prescribed fire in post-harvest and young forest (ESH) wildlife openings to maintain, enhance, and direct plant composition towards desired conditions.

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*[second proposal: needs discussion to determine level of support]*

First Proposal(s): main thrust of ideas - Region 8 guidance book addresses standards specific to old growth communities and species. Management strategies can be developed to enhance and maintain old growth and address fire suppression issues. Chris and Ryan will provide language for state natural areas and capture how to deal with natural areas that fall outside the "lines". [DONE]

They'll also attempt to address # 8 the Globe area. Folks in the Globe are going to meet with Megan [note: in previous versions listed as Morgan]. She may have a proposal. There is a large old growth in the area and perhaps a small patch.

Key Points:

- The Interface and Matrix raises concerns for small natural areas, rare plant communities, for defined areas, for natural areas
- General concerns for employee turnover and how to proposed sideboard language in mixed use areas where it includes management for areas of protection as well as early successional habitat including timber management.
- Need an inventory for old growth and natural areas much in the way for other wildlife and other plants (an accounting)
- Current understanding of old growth is that FS plans to take forward the large and medium patches of old growth from previous plan which are the large and medium patches plus Wilderness and Backcountry, about a 1/3 of the Forest. Under the ecozone, NRV model, roughly, and depending on the ecozone, about half the forest should go towards existing old growth over the long term. Need an inventory system
- Two paradigms being discussed: prohibiting everything such as management is restricted in protected area (fire controls, road building,) to maximum discretion for applying management activities (general thinning of an area to restore old growth characteristics, harvesting an area).
- What defines old growth? FS? Region 8 Guidelines? Some unique old growth are within the current lines on the FS maps

3. **How could Gragg Prong be preserved for its wild & scenic quality while in the MA of Matrix?**

Proposal (Kevin Colburn): It should be found eligible for Wild and Scenic designation. The Forest Service indicated they were not in initial support of this finding, but request reconsideration. The Gragg Prong is reasonably protected as part of the Lost Cove Wilderness Study Area for the foreseeable future. Given this fact, it is a relatively low priority for spending time on recommending changes to it, except for a simple recommendation for eligibility.

*[new proposal: needs discussion to determine level of support]*

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4. **Submitted from ACCESS Climbing Community regarding the Eastern Escarpment GA**

**description:**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 boast important climbing history for North Carolina, 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.

**Proposal 1:** Zachary Lesch-Huie. 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.

**Proposal 2:** Connecting people to the land goal 1: *Maintain and enhance access to the region’s outstanding recreational opportunities for climbing, fishing, hiking, hunting, mountain biking, scenic viewing, rock hounding, wildlife viewing, whitewater boating, **horseback riding**, and sustainable other recreation activities. [insert from Deirdre]*

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**Proposal 3:** Connecting people to the land goal 2: *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.

**Proposal 4:** Enhancing and restoring resiliency goal: *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.*

**Proposal 5:** 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.*

**Proposal 6:** 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 guidelines, if not already there.

**Proposal 7:** 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.*

**Proposal 8:** 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.*

**Proposal 9:** Add additional goal. *Work with recreation groups to maintain the integrity and resiliency of rare plant communities through site specific management, stewardship and education.*

**Areas for Proposal Development – Eastern Escarpment GA**

1. Other Eastern Escarpment Ideas on Right-side of Column of Synopsis Document