

**DISCUSSION AGENDA OF GREAT BALSAM & HIGHLAND DOME GEOGRAPHIC AREA  
SMALL GROUP MEETING AGENDA & MEETING NOTES**

**Tuesday, July 11, 2017**

**12:00 – 4:00pm**

**Franklin, NC**

**The Meeting Outcomes:**

1. One or more proposals of mutual interests are developed and described for the geographic area (s).
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 Aug 21.
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:**

- **GREAT BALSAM GA** maps, description, and goals [www.fs.usda.gov/detail/nfsnc/home/?cid=fseprd491137](http://www.fs.usda.gov/detail/nfsnc/home/?cid=fseprd491137)
- **HIGHLAND DOME GA** maps, description and goals [www.fs.usda.gov/detail/nfsnc/home/?cid=fseprd491137](http://www.fs.usda.gov/detail/nfsnc/home/?cid=fseprd491137)
- **Great Balsam GA** Synopsis derived from either the June 6 or June 13 facilitated discussions located online [www.nationalforests.org/stakeholdersforum](http://www.nationalforests.org/stakeholdersforum)<<http://www.nationalforests.org/stakeholdersforum>>.
- **Highland Dome GA** Synopsis derived from either the June 6 or June 13 facilitated discussions located online [www.nationalforests.org/stakeholdersforum](http://www.nationalforests.org/stakeholdersforum)<<http://www.nationalforests.org/stakeholdersforum>>.

**Attending:** Bill Kane, Jim Gray, David Whitmire, & Hugh Irwin.

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

1. Wildlife - game and non-game wildlife habitat
2. Diversity of habitat that supports diversity of wildlife
3. Species diversity in wildland areas impacted by natural processes
4. Given voice to sportsmen concerning #1 & #2, including access to the forests
5. Given aging sportsmen, disabled youth access to hunting, fishing areas, hiking areas
6. Wildland areas
7. Resilient & adaptive strategies, responsive to climate change, carbon sequestration
8. Providing opportunities for future youth & minorities to engage in the natural environment

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

1. Recreational: kayaking, boating, biking, climbing, hiking, horseback riding, birdwatching, rockhounding, day camping, overnight camping, commercial activities (tourism), scenic & cultural
2. Timber management
3. Forest products
4. Tribal & cultural interests
5. Counties: economic base
  - a. local economies embedded across geographic area in tourism, historical & cultural events, and also covering expenses associated in search & rescue.
  - b. county by county bring in clean industry (ex: micro-brew)
6. Restoration & Forest Health: stands of trees from one species to another, invasives (non-natives), general health of forest, old growth; over-arching theme of SF is General Forest Health
7. Water quality and quantity – creeks and lakes ( SF in agreement about importance of WQ but not in ranking of how to achieve or maintain)

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**Areas of Agreement for Great Balsam**

1. Cowee Mountain chestnut restoration

- a. We thought this should have been an agreement area, not a “needs collaboration” area. We all hope that we’ll be ready to put some chestnuts in the ground during the next planning cycle.

RESULTS of SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION: SF supports Cowee Mountain chestnut restoration as soon as feasible. Will rely on USFS knowing optimal restoration locations given ongoing research and analysis being conducted on subject.

2. Roy Taylor tract:

- a. Because part of the Mountains to Sea trail drops away from the parkway onto legacy roads in this area, we asked: “How can we meet restoration needs using existing access while protecting the recreational experience of the MTS trail?”
- b. Proposed answer: Consider relocating MTS upslope if access for restoration harvest would affect hikers.

RESULTS of SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION: Follow USFS guidelines for trail management. USFS notes that the SF June 13th meeting discussed relocating the MTS upslope. (Note: Lou added June 13<sup>th</sup> meeting for sentence clarity).

3. Tanassee Creek and Tuckasegee flows

- a. These seemed like areas for agreement, not further collaboration (area of agreement) \*check with Jim (this appears to be ok as it discusses flows)

**Areas of Continued Discussion for Great Balsam**

1. **Topic: “Zone of agreement – everything south and west of Tuckasegee River”.** *This is not an area of overall agreement yet. The Alarka Laurel SIA needs work as described below.*

2. Alarka Laurel:

- a. The main suggestion here is that we could benefit from a field trip to talk about the boundaries for the SIA. The concern is that the boundaries may be over inclusive and/or under inclusive.
- b. The values we identified were birding, rare communities, and grouse habitat. (Jim, please correct me if I’ve missed other needs or values.) & water quality.
- c. Framed as a question, “How can we emphasize rare or exemplary natural communities, birding opportunities, and grouse habitat in the Alarka Laurel area?” JG comment – good location for collaboration – some native spruce are not in the SIA and should be, agree on protecting Alarka Creek, SIA is too large and includes lands that need restoration (dense rhododendron, oak restoration, wildlife habitat needs improvement that will not affect native spruce or Alarka Creek, non-native spruce from old Christmas tree farm – leave or restore to oak?)
- d. Alarka creek – value of adding bridge to maintain water quality?

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**ACTION: Jim\*** “The area south and west of Tuckasegee River is not a zone of agreement as the Alarka Laurel SIA needs work as described. Jim to convene field trip to discuss boundaries of area with Sam, Hugh, & Meghan (item #1, #2,a,b,c). Jim discuss item #d with Mike Wilkins regarding Alarka Creek

**2. Sugarcreek fields**

e. Possible question: “How can we protect cultural uses while improving the area as wildlife habitat?”

**ACTION: REFER TOPIC Back to SF to ADDRESS:** The small group, during discussion of Greater Balsam GA, discussed the different cultural uses that might be in the Sugarcreek Fields area (native historical sites, traditional hunting practices) but were not familiar enough with the area or the topic to understand how best to address it. Potentially, may want to talk over priorities and possibilities with Mike Wilkins and/or consider input from users who frequent that area. Area has some rabbit hunting, off-roading trails, and some trash from apparent camping and picnicking. Unclear if it’s an important deer hunting area. No evidence of grouse. There is a small grove of isolated big spruce trees up there though may not be in an ideal area for reseeded.

**3. Topic: Dicks Creek/Pinnacle area**

a. Possible question: “How can we meet restoration needs while also protecting scenic values?”

b. Proposed answer: General scenery standards could ensure that scenic values are accommodated.

**ACTION: Hugh** would like continued dialogue on how scenic values are accommodated in area designated for restoration. Will follow up with Mike Wilkins to see what management activities in Dicks Creek/Pinnacle area are envisioned/possible. Would like to learn how the town views the management of the area. Note: in follow up discussion with Michelle, USFS will present the Federal guidelines on scenery standards (biological values), Aug 17. *Hugh contact Michelle for further info.*

**4. Tanassee Creek and Tuckasegee flows**

a. Would like to see discussion of clean and abundant water in the Tuckasegee hydropower area

**RESULTS of SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION:**

**ACTION: Bill** will follow up with Steve Johnson (Duke Power) on part #b about what info could be provided/shared/presented regarding water quality/quantity in Tuck hydro area.

**Areas of Agreement for Highland Dome GA**

**1. Panthertown**

a. Possible Question: “How can we protect the backcountry recreation experience and unique communities while also meeting needs for ruffed grouse, deer, black bear, and fuels management?”

b. Proposed Answer:

i. North part (north of powerline) stays as mapped with interface and matrix (see note below)

ii. Emphasize use of Rx fire as a management tool and protection of communities to the southeast and southwest of the area.

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- iii. Dismal/Big Pisgah area managed as backcountry with contiguous area in Panthertown (following WRC backcountry proposal boundary)

**RESULTS of SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION:** The group supported the proposed responses and proposal to the question regarding Panthertown.

Following the small group meeting, Hugh received a comment in checking with other interests (Friends of Panthertown) have an interest in Panthertown north of the powerline being in backcountry. Item i.

**2. Rivers (WSR eligibility)**

- a. In general: Propose agreement that the exceptional rivers in this area should be considered relative to the region as a whole, not compared to each other, because they are all the cream of the crop at the landscape scale.

- b. Greenland and Panthertown

- i. Topic for proposed agreement, not further collaboration.
- ii. These are tributaries to eligible river and are already in backcountry

- c. North Fork French Broad

- i. Proposed Question: "How can we recognize and manage for the outstanding and remarkable values of this river without putting a target on it to be over-loved?"

**RESULTS of SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION:** The group supported the proposed rivers for WSR status. Recommended that during the planning/marketing of the tourism its done to limit overmarketing of the WSR.

**3. Blue Valley**

- c. Forest Road 79 is an important access point into the area. Area should be continued under the current designations rather being reclassified into other more restrictive designation.

**RESULTS of SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION:** the group recommended that forest road 79 becomes a cherry-stemmed road if there is a WA designation.

**4. Silver Run SIA**

- a. Probably should be considered an area for agreement (as currently mapped) subject to general understanding about needed management in SNHA/SIA.

**RESULTS of SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION:** The group supported the proposed response to the Silver Run SIA given its natural heritage area status.

**Areas of Continued Discussion and/or Proposals - Highland Dome GA**

**1. Cedar Cliffs**

- a. This was an area where we needed clarification about the boundaries. Similar to Alarka Laurel, there were concerns it might be over inclusive and/or under inclusive. Part of the WRC "frontcountry" is in the SIA, while part of the WRC "backcountry" is in matrix.

**ACTION:** Sam or Meghan clarify this section on the map with Mike Wilkins

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2. Panthertown

- a. Possible Question: "How can we protect the backcountry recreation experience and unique communities while also meeting needs for ruffed grouse, deer, black bear, and fuels management?"
- b. Proposed Answer:
  - i. North part (north of powerline) stays as mapped with interface and matrix

**Determine How to Proceed:** Following the small group meeting, Hugh received a comment in checking with other interests (Friends of Panthertown) have an interest in Panthertown north of the powerline being in backcountry. Item i.

3. Fishhawk Mountain

- a. There may not be a lot of disagreement here in practice. This is a Mountain Treasures area but it is fragmented with private property. The Bartram Trail runs the length of the ridge and there is little road access in some portions. Other values include wildlife habitat and viewing.

**ACTION:** Hugh will seek clarification with Michele Aldridge regarding criteria for backcountry areas and why smaller backcountry areas (especially ones recommended by WRC) can't go to backcountry management. (Note: Hugh added, "why smaller BC areas (especially ones recommended by WRC) can't go to BC management).

4. Blue Valley (J. Gray comments).

- a. Fishing and dispersed, primitive camping are important historical uses in the area and need to be continued.
- b. Not mentioned in the original notes, but important wildlife issue: Blue Valley is an important overwintering area for woodcock. This is the only area in the Nantahala/Pisgah known to me where woodcock are found throughout the winter.
- c. Forest Road 79 is an important access point into the area. Area should be continued under the current designations rather being reclassified into other more restrictive designation.

**RESULTS of SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION:** For 4c, the group recommended that forest road 79 becomes a cherry-stemmed road if there is a WA designation. **(move 4c to section on area of agreement)**

5. Wilderness analysis areas

- a. Need to know: Status of local community positions on wilderness
- b. Possible overall question: How can we meet wilderness goals (naturalness, solitude, primitive recreation, undisturbed habitat and connectivity) *while at the same time....*
- c. Possible answer:
  - i. Overflow WSA - Study area goes forward
  - ii. Ellicott Rock Extension - Contiguous extension area goes forward
  - iii. Terrapin Mountain - Support backcountry area shown on FS maps with connectivity to Ellicott Rock via Chattooga corridor

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**ACTION:** Bill, Hugh, Jim, Sam, & David would meet to discuss the section #4 (Blue Valley) and #5 (Wilderness Area), except as noted, and topics listed as cross-cutting (forestwide). The small group discussed how to balance restoration values including timber management with wilderness and old growth values, and outdoor recreational values - particularly where there is an interface of these values. Example: if a WSA is formally designated a WA, does the designation limit the number of bear hunters into the WA or limit the # of primitive campers? Who defines the limits of acceptable changes for WA designation? Or, for a restoration area that has no timber value? Where there is a limited budget, what supports the restoration initiative?

Following the small group meeting, several team members discussed:

- taking up Item #4 (Blue Valley) and # 1 (wilderness analysis areas) in the context of the Nantahala Mtns GA discussion scheduled for July 26. ***This did not happen at the Nantahala Mountain Small Group Discussion (Lou)***
- that cross cutting forest wide issues (OG, SNHAs, roads, fuels) seem like appropriate discussion points for the Stakeholder Forum in-person meeting “on important informational topics (old growth, natural range of variation, sustainable recreation)” scheduled for August 17. These topics also came up in our July 19 Eastern Escarpment discussion and are likely to come up in other GA meeting discussions.

**Areas of Continued Discussion and/or Proposals - Cross-cutting Forestwide Topics #1-5,**

**Sam/Jim/David offered the following questions (and proposals) on the GA Forest-Wide Perspective.**

In addition to the GA-specific issues, we touched on a few that weren't any easier or harder to answer at the GA level. These seemed like questions to address from the forest-wide perspective.

1.A comment for the Great Balsam GA asked if there was a need to discuss the economic viability of restoration opportunities.

- a. This suggests an important forestwide question: “How can we address restoration opportunities while also meeting the goal of contributing to local economies that rely on timber?”
- b. Possible Answer: Develop priorities for restoration and ask whether the expected products will meet economic needs.

2. Old growth

- a. We talked about the need to address this, but did not develop a specific question.
- b. The values identified are: habitat, NRV, economics of timber sales
- c. A possible solution is to identify priorities for management instead of absolute limitations--i.e., “do this first” instead of “never do this.”

3. Roads

- a. Possible Question: “How can we protect water quality while maintaining roads to provide wildlife habitat and meet budgetary constraints?”
- b. Possible Answer: Consider daylighting roads to reduce maintenance costs and provide browse, especially when NNIS can be controlled.

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- c. Possible Answer: When needed to protect road surface and where available, use limestone gravel to provide both wildlife benefit (gizzard stones) and counteract cation depletion.
- d. Note: these aren't comprehensive answers to the question, but they may be part of it.

**4. Fuels / WUI**

- a. Possible Question: "How can we meet the need for backcountry areas and emphasize the natural role of fire while also protecting property and lives from fire?"
- b. Possible Answer: Focus fuels management strategies and roads that can serve as firelines where possible in the areas between private ownership and backcountry.

**5. SNHAs**

- a. Possible Question: "How can we protect the rare or exemplary communities or habitats in SNHAs while ensuring the Forest Service has the final authority to manage if necessary?"
- b. Proposed Answer: Allow management as needed to maintain or enhance the community for which the SNHA was recognized, but not harvest for its own sake.

**6 Additional Proposals Submitted by a Climbing Community regarding Highland Dome GA description submitted by Zachary Lesch-Huie.**

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:

**Proposal 1:** 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.*"

**Proposal 2:** 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.*"

**Proposal 3:** 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

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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.

**Proposal 4:** 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.

**Proposal 5:** 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.*

**Proposal 6:** 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.*

**Proposal 7:** 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.*

**Proposal 8:** 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.*