

Stakeholders Forum for the Nantahala & Pisgah Plan Revision
ACCOMPLISHMENTS as of November 2017

The National Forest Foundation convened the Stakeholders Forum for the Nantahala & Pisgah Plan Revision in 2015. The Forum developed the following purpose statement and goals:

In a collaborative dialogue amongst stakeholders representing diverse interests, identify zones of agreement to form recommendations around critical resource issues related to the Nantahala and Pisgah National Forests' plan revision. The key issues are forestry and restoration, special designations, sustainable recreation, and wildlife. Recommendations should achieve clean and abundant water, connect communities to the land, and maintain and restore resiliency and diversity.

GOALS:

- *Supplement the Forest Service's public involvement process with collaborative dialogue*
- *Strengthen relationships amongst stakeholders with differing views about how to manage the Nantahala and Pisgah National Forests*
- *Develop consensus recommendations on key issues to provide to the Forest Service*
- *Support the development of an implementable Nantahala and Pisgah National Forests Land and Resource Management Plan*

Each person who has participated in the Stakeholders Forum process has given an incredible amount of time, brainpower, and energy over the past two years. This has not been easy. Stakeholders Forum members and alternates have dedicated themselves to learning about the many components of forest plans and how they are developed. We have wrestled with the challenges of overlaying multiple objectives and values to manage a large and diverse landscape. We have struggled to understand the viewpoints of others, but we have continued on the path toward building understanding, widening the zone of agreement, and thinking creatively to develop strategies that can be collective "wins." While the Stakeholders Forum has met three of our four original goals so far, we have not developed consensus recommendations to the extent that we had hoped. The life of the Stakeholders Forum and the process of developing the forest plan is not over, however, and we look forward to continuing to engage together, with the Forest Service, and with others who care about the management of the Nantahala and Pisgah National Forests.

The Stakeholders Forum is proud of our collective accomplishments:

➤ **Organized and Launched a Diverse Collaborative Effort**

A small organizing committee met in July and August 2015 to begin organizing the Stakeholders Forum. Members developed and sought agreement on a purpose statement, goals, code of conduct, list of interests to invite, and membership list. The full Stakeholders Forum met for the first time in September 2015. **The Stakeholders Forum represented a broad and very inclusive constituency on the Nantahala and Pisgah National Forests.** The cross section of diverse interests at the table agreed to move forward to develop forest plan recommendations

around the issues of sustainable recreation, forest management/restoration and special area designations.

➤ **Improved Communication among Stakeholders and the Forest Service**

The Stakeholders Forum’s collaborative efforts **fostered dialogue** among forest stakeholders, the Forest Service and the broader community. Additionally, **Stakeholders led informal discussions and meetings outside of the formal process that may not have otherwise happened, such as a gathering at Lake Logan among various interests, and on-going discussions around spatial data and mapping.**

➤ **Increased Understanding of and Support for the Forest Planning Process**

Through continual dialogue between the Stakeholders Forum and Forest Service staff, **Stakeholders Forum members developed an important understanding of the Forest Service’s plan revision approach, and helped build support for the process.** For example, after learning about the Forest Service’s evaluation process for Wild & Scenic Rivers and inventory process for wilderness characteristics in October 2015, the Forum agreed on this statement by consensus:

The Stakeholders Forum for the Nantahala & Pisgah Plan Revision expresses confidence in the work done by the Forest Service to identify rivers that may be identified as Wild & Scenic Rivers, and to inventory areas that may have wilderness characteristics. We look forward to participating in the evaluation process.

Many forum members also attended the Forest Service’s public meetings held throughout 2015 - 2017, **servicing as ambassadors of the Stakeholders Forum, answering questions from other members of the public, and showing support for the Forest Service’s process.**

The Forest Service, in turn, has demonstrated transparency in plan component development through the Plan Revision website, by opening interdisciplinary team meetings (IDT) to the public, releasing plan components and sharing “current thinking” in real time, and hosting informational meetings and presentations.

➤ **Established and Strengthened Relationships and Built Trust**

Stakeholders Forum members improved relationships and built new trust across interests with a history of conflict. Even during rocky points, **Forum members made good faith efforts to build bridges, understand the values of individual members, and overcome old conflicts.** Many feel optimistic that the Forum will help transition a historically contentious environment toward more positive, productive space for communication and collaboration around forest issues beyond the forest planning process. The Stakeholders Forum recognizes that trust building efforts need to continue.

➤ **Provided Input on Draft Forest Plan Components**

The Stakeholders Forum provided the Forest Service with proposals, modifications and additions to the Forest Service’s draft plan components, including forestwide desired conditions, geographic areas, management areas, and special designations, particularly related to sustainable recreation, aquatics, ecozones, wildlife, and forest/vegetation management.

The Stakeholders Forum provided input on the range of viewpoints regarding the components, asked questions, and engaged in dialogue amongst ourselves and with the Forest Service on this great volume of information around special designations. **The Stakeholders Forum’s input provided a social context for science and technical information and incorporated local knowledge.**

Group members independently and in cooperation with the Forest Service **developed map-based products that spatially displayed various interests as a base for further detailed discussion.**

➤ **Engaged in Discussions with County Officials**

The Stakeholders Forum has more recently been engaging in discussions with county commissioners about their interests in the Forest Plan.

➤ **Established a Model for a Collaborative Process Engaging in Forest Planning and Learned Many Lessons**

Not many National Forests & Grasslands have worked with a collaborative group like the Stakeholders Forum in their plan development processes. **The Stakeholders Forum established a model from which other forests and communities can learn, due to the lessons and experience resulting from this process.**

Stakeholders Forum members have gained a tremendous amount of knowledge, and have served as liaisons with their own organizations, constituencies and the general public by sharing information about the planning process and bringing information back to the collaborative table. Local, state, national and international organizations, agencies and companies represented their interests and values in the forest planning process through the Stakeholders Forum at an extremely high level, some of whom have not previously been involved in planning.

➤ **Developed Proposals and Conducted a Strawpoll Exercise to Show Range of Agreement/Disagreement**

During the summer of 2017, Stakeholders Forum members engaged with one another and with their networks to develop proposals. The intent was to develop proposals collaboratively, generate ideas and build understanding, and document the range of agreement and disagreement among stakeholders. The NFF compiled and posted the proposals to Google Docs as three collections: Geographic Area Proposals, Management Area Proposals, and Forest-wide

Proposals. Stakeholders Forum members then reviewed and commented on the draft proposals in the Google Docs format.

At the September 25, 2017 meeting, Stakeholders Forum members participated in a strawpoll exercise to register thumbs up (green, or “full approval”), thumb to the side (yellow, or “can live with”), orange (“I could live with the proposal if...”), or blue (“I can’t support this proposal because...”). The Stakeholders Forum reviewed more than 165 proposals (some of which overlap). The tallies for each proposal represent a snapshot of people’s views toward the proposals at that time, recognizing that this is a fluid process and perspectives and ideas continue to evolve due to continuing discussions amongst different interests. NFF posted the results of this tally process onto the Google Docs versions of the proposals. Thus, the Google Docs for [Geographic Area Proposals](#), [Management Area Proposals](#), and [Forest-wide Proposals](#)* include the proposals themselves, initial feedback from Forum members (comment boxes), proposed amendments (in orange) and the range of agreement and disagreement for each proposal. This process supported the Stakeholders Forum in providing input from a wide range of well-informed stakeholders on the agency’s initial thinking regarding Forest Plan Revision. For further information on the proposals and to find links (if you are reading a paper version of this document), go to www.nationalforests.org/stakeholdersforum.

The following Statement of Good Intent is based on a similar agreement by members of the Forum from May, 2016. This updated iteration is intended to build upon the good will that has accumulated between Stakeholders Forum members and between the Stakeholders Forum and the Forest Service, and to carry that positive intent forward through the draft plan and draft Environmental Impact Statement process.

Stakeholders Forum for the Nantahala & Pisgah Plan Revision Statement of Good Intent

The Stakeholders Forum for the Nantahala & Pisgah Plan Revision (Stakeholders Forum) is a group of people representing diverse interests who each care deeply about the Nantahala & Pisgah National Forests. We have met for over two years, and each of us has dedicated significant time and energy toward engaging in the plan revision process and learning about each other's perspectives. The Stakeholders Forum will meet again when the draft plan and environmental impact statement are ready. Whether we are in meetings together as the Stakeholders Forum, in our own organizations, in small groups, communicating with the Forest Service, or out in our communities talking with others and with the media, we pledge the following as our "statement of good intent."

- We support and respect the diversity of interests and the collaborative process as described in the Stakeholders Forum Purpose and Goals and Code of Conduct.
- We are committed to continuing to engage constructively in the plan revision process.
- We have built relationships that we will rely upon as we continue to discuss tough issues of conflict. We will assume good intent from others and will depend upon each other for information and feedback. We will maintain open lines of communication with each other, and will reach out to those with different interests as much as we reach out to those with whom we more easily align.
- We will be respectful even when we do not agree with each other or the Forest Service.
- We know we are not in agreement on everything, and that causes us to be fearful of how other interests on the Stakeholders Forum will respond to the draft plan. We will strive, however, to counter our fears through open lines of communication and modeling professional respect to each other and the Forest Service.
- We are committed to engaging with each other to build understanding of each other's perspectives.
- We will seek to represent the constructive dialogue developed within the Stakeholders Forum in our communications with our constituencies and the broader public.
- We agree that all Stakeholders Forum members and the public have the right to advocate for their interests, and recognize that such advocacy should be respectful of the collaborative nature of the Forum.
- We appreciate the opportunity to engage with Forest Service staff in this important process, and thank the agency for their transparency and willingness to share plan components as they are developed.
- As individuals and organizations, we see a continued opportunity to work together beyond the forest plan development and into implementation. These Nantahala & Pisgah National Forests are where we live, work and play, and we are united in our love for, appreciation of, and reliance upon their lands, waters, and wildlife.