

Stakeholders Forum for the Nantahala & Pisgah Plan Revision

Wednesday, November 8, 2017
10:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m.
Lake Logan Episcopal Center
25 Wormy Chestnut Lane, Canton

Stakeholders Forum:

Chris Coxen, National Wild Turkey Federation
*Rob Elliot, Evergreen Packaging
*Sam Evans, Southern Environmental Law Center
*Susan Fletcher, Pisgah Hardwood
*Jim Gray, Ruffed Grouse Society
*Ruth Hartzler, Carolina Mountain Club
Hugh Irwin, The Wilderness Society
*Bill Kane, NC Wildlife Federation
*Josh Kelly, MountainTrue
Zach Lesch-Huie, Access Fund
Andrea Leslie and Ryan Jacobs, NC Wildlife Resources Commission (shared seat)

*Deirdre Perot, Back Country Horsemen of NC, NC Horse Council
Ben Prater, Defenders of Wildlife
Jim Sitts, Columbia Forest Products
Curtis Smalling, National Audubon of NC
Gordon Warburton, Quality Deer Management Association
Julie White, SORBA/IMBA
*David Whitmire, Fish and Wildlife Conservation Council
Bill Yarborough, Commission of Agriculture, North Carolina

*Organizing Committee members

Forest Service:

Michelle Aldridge
Sheryl Bryan
Alice Cohen
Chad Cook

Erik Crews
Larry Hayden
Heather Luczak
Allen Nicholas

Alternates/Observers:

Emily Cleaver, Land Between the Lakes Association
Bob Gale, MountainTrue (alternate for Josh Kelly)
Jill Gottesman, The Wilderness Society (alternate for Hugh Irwin)
Jon Hallemeier, Coweeta Listening Project (note-taker for the National Forest Foundation)
Don Mallicoat, Ruffed Grouse Society (alternate for Jim Gray)
Robin Ramsey, Office of Senator Richard Burr
??, Office of Senator Thom Tillis

National Forest Foundation:

Karen DiBari
Mary Lou Addor

Meeting Objectives:

- Set the stage for continued dialogue amongst interests in the Stakeholders Forum, and keeping communication lines open

- Move forward understandings of how multiple interests and values can be addressed within projects and what plan level components can direct and facilitate these projects
- Celebrate the understanding that has developed and the relationships that have been created
- Understand the Forest Service timeline and workplan, and potential timing of upcoming Stakeholders Forum meetings

Welcome and Greetings

Karen DiBari began the meeting by passing out agendas and the sign-in sheet. Attendees greeted each other and new faces were introduced. Karen reviewed the agenda for the day, developed in part through conversations of the organizing committee, which met the day before. The organizing committee talked about keeping lines of communication open, having a meeting of the Stakeholders Forum when the draft EIS and alternatives come out, and integrating the different objectives that the Forum has raised over months of work. They also developed some questions to structure discussion.

Forest Supervisor Allen Nicholas gave his continued thanks for the ongoing efforts of the Forum. He wants to give the planning team time and space to look through all the input and produce balanced representation in the plan alternatives.

Michelle Aldridge echoed Allen's thanks and commended all the good ideas that have come from the group and their roles as liaisons with wider sets of communities.

Mary Lou Addor directed the group's attention to the wall and a sheet asking "What are your greatest hopes about the planning process?" and a second sheet asking "What are your greatest fears (concerns) about the planning process?" Attendees were invited to write their hopes and fears on sticky notes and place them on the sheets throughout the day (Appendix A).

Forest Service Timeline

Michelle Aldridge introduced the Forest Service timeline and reported on the work of the interdisciplinary team (IDT), which has been working with the information the Forum and others had provided before the end of September deadline. The IDT has been meeting internally to get a handle on all the information, understand it, and adapt it to a range of alternatives. They are trying to find the range, not the perfect plan, in order to complete the draft EIS and get analysis of effects to the public for a formal 90-day comment period. Michelle predicted a draft EIS in the spring, though the exact timeline is dependent on many factors. Michelle committed to keeping the group posted on progress.

Some Forum members asked whether versions of the alternatives would be released as they are developed and before analysis. Members said that this could increase buy-in, help ensure the Forest Service is capturing the range, avoid miscommunication, and avoid black-boxing the process. Several members did not support sharing the alternatives before the draft EIS.

Michelle replied that the team had talked about this issue, but they are trying to find the sweet spot where the alternatives have enough detail to be helpful. She reiterated that the planning team has a lot of information from the public to guide the development of an effective range of alternatives. It will take

time to build the alternatives. Michelle said that the team is also talking to the Regional Office, which is another important part of alternative development.

Win All You Can

Mary Lou Addor led the group in a game, Win All You Can. The goal of the game was for each person to try to get as many points as they could. Each person sat at a table of four players and had an “X” card and an “O” card. There were ten rounds in the game, and in each round every player had to play either X or O. If all players played O cards, all players would get 1 point. If a player put down an X while one or more of the other players put down an O, that player would get more than 1 point in that round and the O-players would get negative points. However, if all players put down Xs, then everyone would get negative points. Players were not allowed to talk or coordinate until the fifth round, and there were multiple bonus-rounds worth more points.

After playing the ten rounds of the game, the highest-scoring table had 92 points total and the lowest-scoring table had -36 points. The group discussed the game and their experience of it. Tables where players had consistently played Os ended the game with more points, working more collaboratively and building trust. Where players had “cheated” and played Xs, the tables ended with fewer points, with individuals attempting to maximize points in a few rounds and leading to everyone playing Xs in future rounds for negative points. The group noted multiple takeaways from the activity:

- Being able to talk and communicate in the fifth round helped many tables coordinate and collectively figure out how to get the most points, though others had used this opportunity deceptively.
- Trust comes from trustworthiness and being consistent, showing your own trustworthiness. We negotiate with deeds as well as words.
- Short term gains at the expense of others can lead to long term losses.
- Others make choices based on what we do.
- While there was a 10th round in this game, there is no end to the “game” in forest management, and people will continue to work with or against each other.

Small Group Discussions

Rather than revisiting specific proposals during the meeting, the Organizing Committee (OC) developed four questions to structure group discussion. Members of the OC recapped the discussion that led to the four questions, laying the groundwork for small group conversations. The questions were crafted to move the Forum along in thinking through how multiple interests and values can be addressed within projects, providing guidance at the plan level so that these negotiations do not have to occur at the project level.

The group read through the four questions, which generated general discussion. The group identified the level of flexibility and assurance within the plan as central areas of discussion. Some members expressed concern that the Forum is moving towards micromanaging the Forest Service, such as in language about bringing parties in early and requiring more steps before the Forest Service can move forward on projects. Others are concerned about building rigidity into the plan, thus compromising the flexibility needed to deal with an uncertain future. Other members are concerned that too much

flexibility in the plan could lead to the need for more negotiation at the project level, suggesting instead that the Forum make zones of agreement clear so that the Forest Service knows what to expect in potential projects.

It was clarified that the hope for the small group discussions was to make progress on finding the right balance of flexibility, working through ways to protect special or sensitive places when encountered on the landscape and achieve objectives in recreation, timber, wildlife, restoration, and other interests. Balancing these goals and issues of flexibility and clarity could be achieved in multiple ways, such as through management area language or categories, standards, guidelines, objectives, designations, and the ways in which these plan components fit together.

In addition to general discussion, Forum members had suggestions for changes in question wording and focus. Small groups were encouraged to approach these questions however was most helpful, whether that was more narrowly or opening up discussion to broader issues.

Each question was written on a flip-chart and placed in a different part of the room. Members self-selected to form small groups for discussion around a question. There were two rounds of discussion, with lunch in between, so that group members had the chance to engage with two of the questions.

The group reconvened after the small groups and reported back on ideas and questions generated by various members in the discussions:

Question 1: How can the plan build in the flexibility to maintain the character of the State Natural Heritage Areas (SNHAs), while also achieving recreation, ecological restoration, wildlife, and timber objectives?

- How are we going to manage areas and maintain unique qualities? SNHAs are unique and require extra attention to maintain the ecological character of these areas.
- Use broader language to ensure that we have a flexible approach, not hands off, for areas that need active management to maintain/enhance unique values. The Forest Service needs the flexibility to accomplish goals.
- Involve stakeholders and the State into project discussions even before the scoping stage of projects. Strengthen the community connections section of the plan to talk about diverse voices and priorities in project development.
- Manage with consideration of the larger landscape of state lands, other public lands, and private lands.
- How spatially explicit will we be in standards and guidelines about SNHAs? Will they be based on state rankings? There is disagreement whether a unique management area (MA) is needed, as these areas are across the forest. Would a separate MA decrease issues at the project level? Could there be a forest-wide layer of consideration? Perhaps SNHAs meet high conservation value evaluations?
- This should apply to all natural area priorities, not just SNHAs, at plan level.
- Include assurance that objectives are strictly focused on the benefit to the SNHA and not economics.
- Is the plan a restoration plan?

- Reference existing values of these areas acknowledging uncertainty in the future.
- Unless a mapping error, no regeneration harvest in SNHAs because the ecosystems are in good condition. The exception could be invasions of uncharacteristic vegetation.
- Considering larger landscapes could provide opportunity to accomplish multiple goals and maximize efficiencies.
- Need more specifics beyond the “givens” to assure management actions will be appropriate.
- Consider the costs of these projects. Consider using timber receipts/stewardship.
- Will need more buy in if projects are nearby/visible.
- The unique characteristics of the SNHA should guide management activities:
 - Outline management activities by SNHA
 - Map out
 - Identify priorities
 - Evaluate management needs for each SNHA (stretch objective)

Question 2: How can the plan protect scenic values and recreation, while also increasing the scale of ecological restoration?

No small groups met on this question, but a few comments were written by members on the flip-chart.

- Just include us, include relevant recreation groups in each project
- When selecting projects, take into consideration potential areas where recreational interests could also benefit

Question 3: How could plan components work together to be implementable on a project while achieving multiple, integrated objectives? [e.g. increase the pace and scale of timber harvest and habitat creation, maintain and enhance recreational experiences and trail maintenance/construction, old-growth forest and natural areas, increase the pace and scale of restoration, and protect water quality]

- Use condition-based objectives to integrate silvicultural and restoration goals.
- Prioritize outcomes to drive projects (e.g. trails that could be made from temporary roads for trail connectivity).
- Larger project areas could help integrate more objectives.
- Bring people in on project areas to find opportunities to work on more objectives at once.
- Coordinate with recreation user council on silvicultural projects. This could help with communication and interpretation of benefits of projects.
- Think about the order of questions that drive projects to maximize benefits for more interests (e.g. is the first question about timber, restoration, or recreation?).
- Strengthen collaboration language and standards in the community-connection section for coordination with communities.
- Look towards a working forest model.
 - Win/win
 - Good neighbor authority
 - Stewardship funding
 - More efficient planning
- Look towards adaptive management and monitoring.
- Integrated Resource Management is a potential model to maintain flexibility, test for flexibility.

- Have specific goals/objectives stated in plan, such as already listed in ecozone description documents, desired conditions.
- Are there more specific objectives for other values than vegetation management like recreation, ecological restoration, wildlife?
- Example of standards, “the USFS shall...”
- Forest wide planning level: “all projects will work to integrate multiple resource objectives.”
Ground level: integrate projects, then check to see if all components are there.
- Need to see Forest Service analysis and revisit with the Forum

Question 4: How can the plan support achieving 4-6,000 acres of open forest conditions/early successional habitat each year (3-4,000 acres of commercial/non-commercial treatments as needed based on forest composition and structure restoration goals, and 1-2,000 acres of prescribed fire designed for significant basal area reduction), while also maintaining/enhancing:

- Sufficient forest in core unfragmented blocks where natural processes dominate across all ecozones and elevation
- recreational experiences
- existing old-growth forest and natural areas
- increasing the pace and efficiency of restoration, and
- protecting water quality?

- While the question focuses on active management, there is a need to lift all interests.
- Connect roads and ecozones to drive where timber harvest is occurring, starting in areas of high road density in matrix and interface for timber harvest and open forest.
- Consider diverse tools - there is no cookie cutter approach.
- There is a spectrum of opinion around roads, either as an investment that needs to be maintained or as a system that cannot be maintained and requires prioritization of which are really needed. Acknowledge that access is an important issue for the public.
- Consider various elevations and aspects, monitor the big picture for habitat needs.
- Larger scale and scope in projects could enable more objectives to be addressed at one time.
- Diversity of projects and locations needed to achieve a diversity of habitats, recreation, etc.
- Ramp up timber harvest.
- Daylight roads.
- Focus on ecozone objectives (e.g. woodlands, shortleaf pine forests, dry oak forests, mesic oak)
- Use sideboards but respond to site specific needs.
- Plan to maintain early successional habitat for habitat quality.
- Consider context of private and other lands in defining project objectives.
- Prioritize road maintenance in restoration areas.
- Identify goals associated with roads in order to answer where to invest in the context of the management area and other objectives including access.
- Create a matrix of needs/opportunities and rating 1-10.
- Use "optimization" analysis/spectrum runs of alternatives (objective functions) constraints/opportunities/outputs.

Accomplishments and Statement of Good Intent

The group then turned to updating a document of Forum accomplishments and a Statement of Good Intent. In May 2016, the group had been meeting monthly and took a break over the summer. At that point, two documents were created, the first a statement of good intent and the second a documentation of accomplishments. The aim at this meeting was to update those documents to keep up with the history of the group and reflect on what has been achieved.

Forum Accomplishments

Members read over the accomplishments document and recommended changes and additions:

- The document should better capture how hard the process was and the hard work and commitment required from members to work through difficult issues.
- The document stated that the Forum represents a more inclusive constituency than had previously come together on the Nantahala-Pisgah National Forest. Some members were concerned about this statement, pointing to the existence of other groups and the recognition that representation is not exhaustive. It was suggested to reword the statement to say the Forum is broad and very inclusive. (p 1)
- The document should celebrate great progress but also acknowledge that there is not consensus.
- The document spoke of knowledge gained by members. This should be expanded to say that there are local, state, national, and international organizations, agencies, and companies engaging with this process at an extremely high level and representing their interests and values in the forest planning process, some of who have not previously been involved in planning. (p 3)
- The document should reinforce how Forum members have served as liaisons to home organizations, constituencies, as well as the general public. (p 3)
- There was some concern about the documentation of the range of agreement and disagreement mentioned in the document as some of this agreement and disagreement is conditional, but members could live with the language in the document.

After discussion and with revisions, the document was approved by the group by consensus (thumbs vote).

Statement of Good Intent

Members then read over the Statement of Good Intent. It was originally drafted and voted on in May 2016. The draft was updated for the meeting, such as the addition of a statement about transparency and an updated timeline. The group discussed the document with the intent to renew commitment to the statement.

There was some discomfort with the language “we will seek to be ambassadors for the plan revision process.” Some members felt that this would require that members commit themselves to the outcome of the process or to be silent on problems they see with the process. The group agreed to change the language from “ambassadors for the plan revision process” to “seeking to represent the constructive dialogue of the Forum and the plan revision process.” This entails not representing destructive dialogue. With this revision, the Forum approved the Statement of Intent by consensus (thumbs).

Round Robin

In the final part of the meeting, each person in the room was asked to 1) share something they have learned from their engagement with the Forum up to this point and 2) answer how the Forum could work together when the draft plan and the draft EIS are released. Members expressed interest in collecting lessons learned from this collaboration experience that could inform other collaborative efforts regionally and nationally. Karen said the National Forest Foundation is intending to put together a survey to get feedback, lessons and recommendations from members. Some lessons are captured below with group answers to question 1.

Question 1: Lessons Learned

- Learned about other people, organizations, and interests not known before.
- Learned more about bureaucracy and how it works.
- Learned how hard the Forest Service's job is.
- The timber industry and environmental organizations can be unlikely allies.
- Everyone has amazing passion and love for the resource, and everyone agrees on that if not other things.
- There is more common ground than some had thought possible.
- Inclusivity is a challenge.
- Commitment is necessary. It takes many interactions to get to the bottom of the tough stuff.
- Transparency among partners and agency staff is critical.
- The concerns on this national forest are more passionate and complex than many other forests.
- Learned how integrated interests are, how complex these issues are, and that it is hard to look at one thing.
- There is a lot of experience and depth of knowledge in the room.
- The Forest Service is less rigid and more open than previously thought.
- Need to listen when others share their hopes and fears.
- There is a gap between local and national conservation voices that needs to be closed.
- Learned how recreation interests related to other conservation interests.
- There is tremendous opportunity for multiple use and trust building.
- Learned that assumptions about Forest Service management of wildlife may be wrong and that there is sometimes a need to stand up and speak.
- Learned how delicate collaboration can be, how hard it is to build trust and how easy it is for it to erode.
- Reinforced the lesson that public lands matter and leadership matters.
- Learned from specific presentations made by various interests, giving information as well as insight into where others are coming from.
- The forest and the plan are powerful in bringing people together.

Question 2: Working together for the draft plan and draft EIS

- There are still questions of whether the Forum is headed for a win-win or win-lose strategy.
- Need to tell the public and support the process, making sure people know they are not going to get everything they want.
- Continue working on outreach to counties and playing roles as representatives in talks with counties.

- Continue talking over coffee, beer, email, phone, etc.
- Work through test cases/hypothetical projects with the alternatives that come out, as was done on the Flathead National Forest. See how the alternatives satisfy interests on the landscape before voting.
- The Forest Service could share key findings from effects analyses to help with communication to constituencies and the public.
- Work with draft alternatives before the 90-day comment period to work things out with constituencies and get out in front of issues.
- Continue collaboration in the 90-day comment period after the alternatives are released. Remain civil, not eroding what has been accomplished.
- Begin working together on project level things and project development, looking for opportunities for win-wins for timber, roads, and facilities, while also maintaining other values on the forest.
- Identify and help fix possible misconceptions in own organizations and constituencies

Closing Comments

One member of the Forum, Richard Mode, has had to withdraw from his involvement. Members recognized his many contributions to the wildlife world and to collaboration and decided to send a card on behalf the Forum in thanks.

Forest Service staff expressed their appreciation for the dedication of all Forum members. They were hopeful that members feel empowered, recalling the beginning of the Forum when many interests thought that others had more power in the process. Forest Service employees who moved to other national forests but who had been very involved with the planning process passed along encouragement, applauding the work of the Forum as a service to the nation and a demonstration of democracy as well as calling the Forum one of the most dedicated collaborative groups they had ever seen, sticking through ups and downs. The Forest Service staff committed to doing the best they can with what the Forum has provided and will attempt to create alternatives that represent everyone and which do not repolarize issues. They welcomed more conversations.

Karen closed the meeting, encouraging members to continue the dialogue and good intent. The National Forest Foundation committed to creating a survey to further collect lessons from the group. The meeting ended with a round of applause for each other, the Forest Service, and the NFF. Members moved on to refreshments and further informal conversation.

Appendix A

What are your greatest fears (concerns) about the planning process?

- Tension between: flexibility and assurance of plan (especially with staff turnover)
- I fear that louder voices not in this Forum put pressure on the final outcomes that negates our hard work
- That nothing about implementation changes despite our efforts
- I fear that the plan will set unrealistic expectations for the creation and maintenance for early successional habitat by not fully considering economic reality
- One or most interests feels their wants are mostly not met
- Disproportionate amount of land put into designated categories preventing timber harvest/wildlife habitat creation
- Forest service will be hamstrung by groups with narrow, restrictive goals. Unable to achieve a good pace of meeting broad needs.
- That some members of the Forum who seem to respond to most info and proposals with negative and obstructive comments are able to shut down progress
- I fear the whole planning process could be changed dramatically by our current administration
- Continuation of doing nothing for the forest like the last 20 years.
- I fear that the plan will not provide enough standards and guidelines to protect biodiversity and the vulnerable species and rare communities will be exposed to management activities incompatible with resource protection and biodiversity conservation
- That local political interests (eg county commissions) will object to the draft EIS and range of alternatives, trumping the work that has been done to develop a plan that reflects so many interests and their objectives.
- I fear that we will over-designate and attempt to micro-manage the planning process which will hamstring and further cause decrease in increasing pace and scale of restoration.
- Some powerful organization or person not involved in our process intervenes and negates our process
- Unhealthy, dead, and decaying forest and leaving the lands vulnerable to random and catastrophic events -- causing us to react, rather than plan and act pre-emptively.
- Doing nothing and the very **real and present danger of inaction!** There are threats of large-scale "re-sets" looming without human involvement - ask Gatlinburg and the folks in the west....
- "Analysis paralysis" will continue to plague the agency - the threat of litigation will hinder progress: re-design the USFS "identity" and please steward these forests.
- That goals will continue not to be met. David W.
- That groups move back to corners and not move forward in process to meet today's issues. David W.

What are your greatest hopes about the planning process?

- Applaud the Forest Service for the transparency used in this process and hope it will continue into implementation
- Hope that the collaborative "spirit" remains for those projects that we have broad consensus on.
- Hope - that the new plan can be a good example for all the national plans going forward.

- I hope the plan will set us up for success by accelerating the scale and pace of ecological restoration and resource protection.
- I hope the plan will strike a balance between management flexibility and appropriate side boards to drive comprehensive projects that protect and restore forest resources.
- 4-6 K acres timber harvested
- No litigation
- Less animosity and more respect between various organizations and representatives of them.
- The plan gets finished.
- Recreation interests will be taken into consideration early in planning projects providing better integration of recreation into forest management.
- Hopes 1
 - Greatly increased pace and scale of wildlife habitat creation/maintenance
 - Strong support for local economies.
- Hopes 2
 - Forest Service will be able to manage based on best available science, needs, directions.
- Healthy, resilient, diverse forest -- with good age class, structure, and composition - now and for the future.
- Implement the working forest model in action: consider the entire land holding over time; always weighing cost/benefit and fiscal constraints in objectives.
- Well-balanced use of **multiple-use mandate**: timber, water, wildlife, recreation, and range (in that ranking!)
- I hope we can do more in the next planning period for the benefit of wildlife and ecological restoration.
- Plan achieves a lot that each interest wants.
- That wildlife populations will prosper through managing the forest for forest and wildlife health. David W.
- That the public will have been educated on the needs of forest and wildlife health. David W.