

PISGAH & NANTAHALA NATIONAL FORESTS

PROPOSED WILDERNESS DESIGNATIONS - ASSESSMENTS AND COMMENTS

compiled by Susan Fletcher

The “wilderness” designation does not afford any conservation benefits that could be provided by other management area designations, in general. In fact, the wilderness designation may actually present obstacles to certain restoration needs, by limiting flexibility in accessible tools for stewarding our federal forestlands. I urge our land managers to leave as many options as possible based on current needs, a changing environment and unforeseen future challenges. Permanent designations may restrict and impede our abilities to manage these lands efficiently, and in a fiscally responsible manner, both in the short and long term. Forever is indeed a long time, that may have unintended consequences.

Proposed new stand-alone wilderness recommendation areas:

Appalachian Ranger District

Black Mountains – 12,473 acres

- Over 50% of this area is potential spruce restoration – approximately 6,390 acres. Due to historic logging practices, and die-off from pest and weather events over the last several decades, this area needs much work. There is possible chestnut restoration here – 3,294 acres, which is less than 25% of the proposed area overall
- This area contains 1,494 acres of The Nature Conservancy’s (TNC) active restoration layer, at about 12%
- This entire region has previous human disturbances established
- There is already Inventoried Roadless Areas (IRA’s) with low access established in this area, so flexibility is important
- The Locust Creek area has become an area of concern for local sportsmen and native people to this region – hoping to resolve access with opening or expansion of an existing road. As with all federal forestlands, revenues could be generated with timber sales and stewardship opportunities for the benefit of many folks in this area.

Craggy Mountains – Big Ivy – 8,693 acres

- The west side of FS 74 has good infrastructure and has had small timber harvests in the past. I recommend future timber activities in these areas, as it is good grouse habitat currently, but will soon age out. Active management is needed to sustain and maintain current early-successional habitat
- Wilderness designation would result in the loss of 12 miles of linear wildlife openings, which need continued day-lighting maintenance, and 4 acres of

openings. Grouse surveys and bear bait line surveys are conducted in this region by the North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission (NCWRC) now, and should continue.

- There is much restoration need in this area: Chestnut – 2,346 acres – 22%, Spruce – 1,292 acres – 12%, active restoration – 667 acres and need to restore poplar. The Craggy Mountains have poor forest conditions in many regions, based on SLID data, and active management is needed.
- Road buffer – 5,413 acres – less than 50%, within 2,000 foot road buffer
- Craggy area – Wildlife Active Management Area (WHAMA) – 8,011 acres – while a wilderness designation would cause obstacles to the work needed.

Slide Hollow

- Depending on the proposed wilderness designation boundary lines, 3.6 miles of linear wildlife openings and 11.6 of openings could be completely shut out

Pigeon River

- High-quality grouse habitat exist, as a result of timber harvests, could be in jeopardy with wilderness designations – as it would be difficult to maintain with mechanized equipment, timber harvest or timber stand improvement activities. ESH habitat requires active management.
- A portion of an existing linear wildlife opening would have restricted access
- Skiffley Creek Grouse Route would be compromised, as the last mile of the current route could become inaccessible to tractor rotary mowers and needed chainsaw work to keep trails open efficiently
- Major noise disturbance from Interstate 40 and aircraft due to FAA Beacon, located on Snowbird
- Limits to burning, including the elk focal area
- Major historical timber harvests in the 1980's
- Harmon Bear Study in jeopardy
- Good road infrastructure exists

Bald Mountain

- Hickey's Fork, a historical and currently utilized bear access road, would be permanently closed to future motorized vehicular traffic
- Future creation of wildlife fields and openings could be impacted

Bearwallow

- Proposed wilderness would remove 2.5 miles of wildlife linear openings and 2.3 openings from active management

- Depending on final boundary line, Higgins Bald could be impacted – it is currently a 2 – 3 acre opening that needs rehabilitation now
- Potential for spruce restoration

Highlands of the Roan #2

- This area contains the highest concentration of early successional habitat on the Appalachian District currently, with high needs to maintain
- This region has the best game animal population numbers of deer and turkey
- Area has golden-winged warblers present
- Proposed wilderness could result in the loss of 5 miles of linear wildlife opening, 104.5 acres of openings
- Restriction on current and future upkeep of Big Hump Mountain Bald

Nolichucky Gorge

- Proposed wilderness would remove 2.4 miles of linear wildlife openings and 5 acres of openings overall
- Wilderness boundary would adjoin other edge openings, restricting future management options – negatively affecting almost ½ mile of linear wildlife openings and 10.7 acres of wildlife openings

Bluff Mountain

- This region contains heirloom apple orchards throughout the landscape, that are currently maintained with use of mechanized equipment, and could result in a massive historical loss of Southern Appalachian heritage

Snowbird Wilderness Study Area (WSA) – 8,900 acres

- There is a linear wildlife opening and a few roads that enter into the eastern boundary – these openings would need to be removed from the WSA.
- Poplar restoration – 94 acres, Active restoration – 430 acres and 1900 acres of poor forest conditions exist – SLID
- Most of the boundary adjoins private lands
- Outside of the WSA – 2,660 acres not listed in the inventory:
 - has four (4) mowed habitat areas and access roads – upland bird and bear bait routes; area is popular for recreation: hunting, camping and delayed harvest fishing – propose continued multiple-use management in this region
 - high elevation early-successional habitat (ESH) potential
 - many historical logging roads, railways, and old home-places exist
 - Good infrastructure in place: FS 2579, FS 75, and FS 2580 – this area has good access and high management potential, as it has been managed as a wilderness for many years. There is also a weather station located in this

area and should be kept open for treatment and stewardship now and for the future. Wilderness designations would restrict this region permanently.
----Potential opportunities for elk restoration in this region

Mackey Mountain - 13,648 acres

- This is a remote area, with limited access
- There are a number of invasive issues in this area – old fields have been taken over by kudzu and need attention.
- Timber harvests have occurred along Curtis Creek Road in the past, and can continue again in the future
- 5,900 acres is already Inventoried Roadless Area (IRA)
- 1,100 acres of fire types are present and need burning, 1,132 acres of potential chestnut restoration, 3,723 acres is in poor forest condition (SLID) and 1,100 acres is in “uncharacteristic” poplar stand
- Road access has 1,935 acres of road buffer
- This region is heavily used by bear hunters

Also in the Grandfather Ranger District, the following comments are submitted:

Dobson Knob

- This area has had timber harvest in the past, creating better grouse habitat and future improvements for grouse can be accomplished along the south end of the proposed wilderness area
- 2.5 acres of fields are open for game now
- Upper side of Hwy 105 on the west side has had timber and prescribed burning, resulting in better grouse and deer habitat. This unit has an active control burn region designated.
- This region is hunted for multiple species. FSR 106 has remained open to traffic during hunting season based on sportsmen complaints when road was closed by the USFS. Anticipate opposition to wilderness designation from many bear hunters in this area.

Dobson Knob Extension

- 7.25 acres of wildlife field is within the wilderness boundary along FSR 106, and field openings along Yellow Mountain. Two new wildlife fields will be lost on the north end that were funded by The Wild Turkey Federation that are not represented on the maps.
- This area is heavily used by turkey, bear, grouse and deer hunters and is managed on an annual basis by the North Carolina Wildlife Resource Commission to maximize productivity of the sites.

- This region has had fire activity in recent years, resulting in positive habitat changes for a multitude of species.

Woods Mountain

- There are large harvested areas with good wildlife habitat
- Contains 7.2 acres of fields on the Glenn tract on the north end, near the Blue Ridge Parkway
- There is good road infrastructure, wildlife fields and systems in place
- This area has potential for large prescribed burns, timber activity, field and road day-lighting opportunities, with room to expand such
- Used by hunters, bikers, hikers, and horseback riders now – multiple uses exist and are not mutually exclusive

Jarrett's Creek

- This region takes in Sandy Flats under the parkway that consists of 6.63 acres of openings, as well as wildlife linear corridors. The fields are maintained annually, with plantings. The unit also takes in a 1.2 acre field along Curtis Creek Road and the total field loss would be 7.8 acres.
- There is potential timber harvest prospects along Jarrett's Creek and Newberry Creek road, as old activity has occurred along Curtis Creek Road

Steels Creek

- This is a highly popular hunting area that has had timber activities along FS 210-A, as well as Steels Creek and Lettered Rock Ridge
- 12.98 acres of wildlife openings and 2.1 miles (5.82 acres) of linear wildlife openings inside projected wilderness area.
- Boundary follows road to Simpson Creek fields, resulting in loss of one acre of an 8 acre wildlife opening
- Multiple logging and skid trails from past activities exist within the proposed area – so infrastructure for future work is in place
- This entire region has had much human disturbance throughout

Linville Pinnacle Extension

- 2 acres of wildlife fields are included in this area. Unit is north of New Wolf Pit and has had timber harvest in the past, as well as past burns to suppress wildfires. This area could be expanded for more prescribed burns, if future Linville Gorge burns are planned, so access is critical.
- This region has surrounding fields and linear wildlife openings that are extensively managed due to proximity to the Gorge. This location is popular with hunters, and horseback riders. Many hikers and mountain bike users enjoy this area, as it contains a good road system.

Lost Cove, Harper Creek and Upper Wilson Creek Wilderness Study Areas

- Some wildlife habitat areas will be lost if this area goes into wilderness
- The boundary lines adjoin many of these openings, eliminating the access and ability to maintain and continue to create the ESH currently in place
- All three of the above-referenced areas will join to make one big block of wilderness. Combined, 1.5 miles of linear wildlife openings and 21 acres of openings would be lost. Currently, there is an old apple orchard that is being cared for, and that is in jeopardy with a wilderness designation

Tusquitee Ranger District

Unicoi Mountains, combined with Cantrell Top – 12,616 acres

Unicoi Mountains/Upper Bald River – 8,952 acres

- Has timber harvest history
- WHAMAS – 4,606 acres – need much management
- Infrastructure is in place: FS 6268, FS 408, FS 6264, FS 6261, and SR 1325 – there are many old logging roads and evidence of old home-steads throughout this region
- Many fragmenting features throughout area
- Potential ESH – both in the short and long-term
- Roads – 3,593 acres buffer
- 1,500 acres of chestnut restoration, active restoration – 2,081 acres, 460 acres of fire-type forest and 110 acres plantation – SLID – 1,654 acres
-

Cantrell Top – 3,664 acres

- Entire area is in WHAMA, as proposed by the North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission
- Timber harvest history: Elbow Creek burn
- Existing infrastructure: FS 82, FS 50, and SR 1327 in place, with many old logging roads and log decks in this area
- Nine seeded habitat improvement areas and access roads in place
- Shuler Creek has bear bait route that uses the road system
- There is high wildlife management potential throughout this region
- Active restoration – 1,305 acres, 434 acres of fire-type forest, 160 acres of plantation-type forest
- Roads – 1,923 acres buffer, where work can occur easily

Boteler Peak

- Proposed wilderness may include the Buck Creek Barrens burn area
- High need to restore current early successional habitat, as it is soon to age out of this classification
- Many access roads and good infrastructure exist: Nelson Ridge Road, FS 351, Tate Gap Road, FS 350, Bruce Ridge Road, FS 6237, and Vineyard Road FS 6226. There are many miles of old logging roads and log decks
- There is an active gem mining on several sites within this region and at least one ruby mine
- The Chunky Gal hiking trail passes through this region
- Golden-winged warbler potential here
- There are unique rock formations near Boteler Peak
- Cell phone tower is in place

Ash Cove

- Currently has 2 seeded habitat areas and 2 mowed roads in place
- Region is a golden-winged warbler priority area
- Used for bear bait and upland bird surveys
- Many historical logging roads and home-sites within, as well as one marked cemetery
- Many maintained roads exist here: FS 6157, FS 423, and FS 2616
- There has been recent timber harvest activity, but there is need for more work within this region
- Unique characteristics of this area: Noise pollution from Hwy 74, Cherokee County Airport noise, and the Great Smoky Railroad nearby
- This area may be in the path of Courier K 4 proposed highway project

Tusquitee Bald – 23,954 acres

- High road density in place: FS 440, FS 7099, FS 7067, FS 6148, FS 6176, FS 340 and FS 427 – also many historical roads and railway beds throughout
- Currently has twelve (12) mowed wildlife areas that are seeded, with access roads, burns and planned prescribed burns – approximately 3,000 acres and three (3) open balds that will need continued maintenance and mowing
- Excellent grouse habitat, with more ESH potential
- Bear and mast survey routes throughout this area
- Lots of hunting activity: deer, bear and grouse with interest in more hunting and habitat creation opportunities
- Established horse camp areas – high day-use area with waterfalls and wheelchair access trails; multiple-uses occurring there now
- Bear sanctuary within this area and delayed harvest fishing within
- There are currently six inholdings

- WHAMA – 10,277 acres with many restoration needs: SLID 8,555 acres – 30%, poplar – 1,594 acres, need for yellow pine with prescribed burn management – 1,057 acres, The Nature Conservancy active restoration layer comprises 2,925 acres and chestnut opportunity – 3,493 acres
- Road buffer – 8,660 acres
- IRA exists in the middle of this region – need active management around IRA in order to achieve a mosaic of differing age classes, forest structure, composition and diversity

Overflow Creek – 3,813 acres

- FS 79 is an open forest service road where a Grouse Drumming survey route exists alongside road access – 59 acres of potential ESH for management
- This area contains 1.7 miles of linear wildlife openings, 7.9 acres openings
- Most of this region is a Wilderness Study Area (WSA) already, so having flexibility outside this region is imperative for increased diversity.
- Restoration needs: white pine – 395 acres, SLID – 150 acres and The Nature Conservancy layer shows 635 acres for active restoration

The total Stand-alone wilderness recommendation is 84,097 acres

Wilderness Recommendation Extensions

Nantahala Ranger District

Southern Nantahala Extensions – 14,773 acres (combines Chunky Gal Ext. B, the Nantahala Extension, and Barkers Creek Ext. D)

Southern Nantahala Extension – 4,298 acres

- This area contains 18 wildlife openings currently, along with an approved burn unit. There has been slash down work along FS 67M1 for grouse habitat work.
- Traditional deer hunting – considered a deer focal area
- Bear bait survey line in place
- Moderate to high management potential throughout this region
- Proposed wilderness extension goes into the Standing Indian Area, which is a traditional deer hunting area and old wildlife management region
- The new boundary line would extend almost to FS 67 (Upper Nantahala) – which is the main access road into Standing Indian. On the southern end, near Yellow patch, there is past timber harvest activity. There is good infrastructure in this area.
- Restoration: Chestnut – 656 acres, SLID – 1,081 acres and TNC active restoration – 101 acres
- WHAMA – 2,361 acres

- Roads – 2,247 acres, less than 52% accessible

Chunky Gal Extension B – 7,785 acres

- Three FS roads that are linear wildlife openings totaling 4.88 miles, and 2 wildlife openings that total 2 acres in this region
- Golden-winged warbler primary priority area – high number of bird counts around timber units and log deck landings
- FS 7215 – borders the boundary, and is a bear bait line and wildlife corridor
- Four timber sale units under the Haystack EA are in this area now
- FS 71 is used to access the Appalachian Trail at Deep Gap and is heavily used by hunters to access this area
- Wild fire history in this region, so continued access is logical and critical.
- Existing infrastructure is in place: FS 6230, FS 6262, FS 71 and US 64 – high historical logging and grazing activities throughout – one seeded habitat improvement area, with good access road and recent road work completed on FS 71D for brook trout. We must weigh cost/benefit over the long-term when weighing forest-wide decisions, and the current road system matters.
- High management potential, with more needed – possible high elevation ESH
- Inholding and sound pollution from HWY 64 on western side
- Restoration: Chestnut – 1,666 acres, TNC Active restoration – 672 acres, SLID – 869 acres and road – 2,413 acres

Barkers Creek – 1,556 acres

- Low potential for active management, with no activity reported
- Road – 447 acres
- Restoration: Chestnut – 768 acres, TNC Active restoration – 301 acres, SLID – 450 acres, WHAMA – 445 acres

Wesser Bald

- Boundary comes close to existing linear wildlife openings and food plots
- Need mechanized equipment to maintain the bald
- Inholding present

Tellico Bald

- Boundary close to existing linear wildlife openings and food plots
- USFS as approved a burn unit within the proposed wilderness boundary
- There are five named balds that are within this region: Tellico Bald, Black Bald, Rocky Bald, Copper Ridge Bald and Burningtown Bald. All of these areas will need intensive management to remain balds.
- 10.71 miles of linear wildlife openings in place, along with 3 acres of wildlife openings – and this area also contains an approved burn unit

- Part of this area is part of the Grouse Research Project
- Area identified as a grouse and deer focal area
- The eastern boundary would border the Needmore Game Lands, where joint projects could occur with the NC Wildlife Resource Commission, if left open to management possibilities, rather than taken out of activity

Terrapin Mountain

- Area contains 3.74 miles of linear wildlife openings and 4.4 acres of wildlife openings, all of which were re-seeded recently
- There is a new wildlife opening off SR 1104
- Approved burn unit within the boundary
- Partial grouse focal area
- One large privately-owned inholding
- There are 3 Forest Service roads and 6 wildlife openings within area
- This region has had recent timber sale activity, with much more future potential for active forest management and restoration work

Fishhawk Mountain

- FS 4522 is an open USFS road used by hunters to access area
- This area is isolated and surrounded by private tracts
- 2 large inholdings
- very little management activity in the past – need for work exists now

Panthertown Valley

- This area is used by many different user groups, including mountain bikers
- This region contains 3.5 acres of wildlife openings and one approved USFS burn unit that was recently burned, with 2 additional proposed burns

Siler Bald

- This area contains 23.38 miles of linear wildlife openings, 12 wildlife openings totaling 11.61 acres, 4.9 acres of which consist of Siler Bald, which would be a great bald restoration area.
- Deer and grouse focal areas
- Golden-winged warbler priority region
- This area contains 3 approved burn units and active timber sales in process
- Two other units lie just outside the proposed boundary – this area is close to US 64 and NC 1310 (Wayah Road) and FS 437 (Rainbow Springs Road)
- The Haystack area is within this region, with pending projects
- This entire area has great access with tons of potential for active management, as much investment and infrastructure has been made

Piercy Mountain Range – ½ in Nantahala, ½ in Tusquitee Ranger District

- One linear wildlife opening exists within the boundary along FS 7208, which is 7.38 miles long
- There are three wildlife openings, totaling 3.2 acres in place
- A system road is on the Tusquitee Ranger District section, which is used by a private landowner to access his property
- Vegetation treatments were part of the Queen Turkey Stewardship Project, which resulted in a new linear wildlife opening and three wildlife openings being re-seeded as part of the project
- Appletree Group Campground is located just outside the boundary, where FS 7208 takes off
- This proposed wilderness boundary has a long, linear configuration
- There is highway and railroad noise pollution within this region

Cheoah Ranger District

Cheoah Bald

- Ledbetter area – high burn activity
- Cheoah Bald is maintained by mowing and power equipment
- High golden winged warbler numbers in this region
- Appalachian Trail has requested more open areas near the trail to keep open existing sites and viewsheds
- Good grouse habitat in place, with upland bird surveys and bear bait routes on Sassafras Gap Road.
- Existing roads in place: FS 259, FS 2610, FS 418
- Evidence of old logging roads throughout, as well as old home-steads
- High forest management potential
- Unique to this area: the Nantahala Gorge and the Appalachian Trail with shelters
- Tons of noise pollution: Hwy 74, Great Smoky Mountain Railway and Gravel Mine

Joyce Kilmer-Slickrock Extension – 3,846 acres (Combines Yellowhammer Branch, Joyce Kilmer Ext. 4, Deep Creek/Avery Creek Ext. 2)

Yellowhammer Branch, Extension 3

- Good timber potential, but little access – 2 roads with potential – FS62 and FS2465 – old roads in place from across the private tract
- No habitat work in place currently

- Needs management, but little infrastructure exists. May have opportunities for timber harvest with a logging forwarder, cable-yarding system, or helicopter, depending on restoration needs of this region

Joyce Kilmer Slickrock, Extension 4

- Access from FS62 – trail system in place from Big Fat Gap – popular bear hunting area
- Low wildlife potential
- No habitat work in place presently, but opportunities exist

Deep Creek/Avery Creek, Extension 2

- Potential for high elevation ESH – roads in place for possible timber harvest and restoration work
- Non-native species invasion present that need treatment
- Medium to high management potential throughout
- Existing infrastructure: FS446, FS62, SR1127, as well as many historical roads for previous timber harvest and access to old home-sites. Again, infrastructure and access is critical both in the short and long-term.

Snowbird

- Has four mowed habitats and access roads – upland bird and bear bait routes
- Popular hunting area, delayed harvest fishing and camping use
- High elevation early successional habitat potential
- Historical logging roads and railways throughout
- There is a steel bridge in place at the headwaters, and many old homesteads
- Road infrastructure: FS 2579, FS 75, FS 2580
- Most of the boundary joins private tracts
- There is high management needs here, as it has been treated as a wilderness for several years.
- There is a weather station located within this region

Yellow Creek Mountains

- Road access throughout: FS 2624, FS 2625, FS 2621, FS 2440, FS 251, and SR 1242. There are many historical roads and old home-places.
- This is a golden-winged warbler priority area.
- The Appalachian Trail comes through this region – Fontana Village nearby
- This region needs management, as it is less than 2 miles from the Great Smoky National Park, where little activity can occur
- This area has “no unique features”.

Joyce Kilmer Slickrock Extension #1

- This region has 14 seeded habitat areas and 5 miles of linear wildlife areas
- This area has grouse, bobwhite quail and golden-winged warblers present.
- Mast surveys are conducted
- Many of the Wildlife Resource Commission staff needs to access many of the backcountry areas off FR 81 for wildlife surveys and to conduct habitat improvement projects
- Popular bear and boar hunting activities
- Good road infrastructure is in place: FS 81, FS 2809, FS 2810, FS 2811, FS 2812, FS 2813, FS 2814, FS 281, FS 2817, FS 2818, and FS 2819
- This area is unique because it joins wilderness areas to the north and west and at Citico Creek
- There is noise pollution from the Cherohala Skyway
- Much management need and potential due to the tract's proximity to other wilderness areas

Santeetlah Headwaters

- This region has 7 seeded wildlife habitat areas and 2 seeded linear wildlife openings
- Mast survey, monitoring of the Northern Flying Squirrel is happening here
- Brook trout monitoring is also taking place due to acid rock from Cherohala construction.
- The Santeetlah Bald has been used to collect data on golden eagles
- This area is popular for bear and boar hunting, as well as high-use for fishing and camping recreationists
- There is high noise pollution from the Cherohala Skyway and has a unique feature of the Santeetlah Creek Gorge nearby

Pisgah Ranger District

Middle Prong Extension – 1,909 acres (only high-elevation region)

- High potential for Chestnut and spruce (441 acres) restoration – 75% of area comprised of chestnut and spruce currently
- Lickstone Heath bald restoration with prescribed fire and need for motorized equipment is vital
- There are numerous existing 10-20 year old timber harvest stands, would be prohibited from further maintenance with removal of motorized access
- Adjacent to Hwy 215, this area has good access and management potential
- Boomer End Trail opening needs continued maintenance
- This area is exposed to noise from a public shooting range
- Yearly Sherwood Mast survey route – inability to clear survey road

- 2 private inholdings
- Currently, Haywood County has 130,000 acres of federal land, and of that 87,108 acres is “off-limits” to management – as it is in the Great Smoky National Parks, the Blue Ridge Parkway, or already designated wilderness – therefore, consider the needs of the already-cash strapped county when making decisions that impact the local economies directly when factoring in search and rescue operations, and the ability (or lack thereof) to generate income off the resources the land currently contains.

Shining Rock Extensions – 1,658 acres (Sam Knob and Graveyard Ridge)

- FS 816 is currently used access for hunters
- Sam’s Knob and Graveyard ESH communities are maintained by prescribed fire and will need motorized access
- Spruce restoration focus – Sam’s Knob – 2,240 acres and Graveyard – 1,585 acres – seedling planting will need mechanical abilities
- *Sam’s Knob region*: The North Carolina Confederate Veterans Memorial Forest is within this region– planted from 1941 – 1943, this 125 acre forest is planted with 125,000 balsam and red spruce trees, spaced at 6 foot intervals, meant to symbolize the 125,000 North Carolinians who served as Confederate soldiers – keeping flexibility to maintain, and manage this forest is critical for historical purposes and for the heritage of the native people – “connecting the people to the land” is a main driver in keeping this land open to all active management options.

Daniel Ridge

- This area currently contains 20 USFS roads, six designated linear wildlife openings and seven wildlife openings
- The management potential is high in this region and would be greatly restricted with wilderness designations

South Mills River

- There is tremendous infrastructure in place throughout this region, with tons of old railroad grades, mining camps and evidence of man throughout this region.
- Turkey Pen and several other linear wildlife openings for ESH habitat would be greatly impacted
- The Bradley Creek series of wildlife openings would be negatively affected, removing the ability to access, maintain, mow and treat the work underway
- There are several pedestrian bridges, which provide access for sportsmen and other recreational users present.

- This entire region is the water intake source for municipalities in Henderson County and as Coweeta Hydrologic Lab demonstrates, water filtration and good forestry are vital in watershed management.

Laurel Mountain

- High management potential
- Lots of use in this region by sportsmen
- Four USFS roads terminate at or within proposed boundary line. Great road systems and infrastructure exists for active forestry, for the benefit of humans and creatures alike.

Cedar Rock Mountain

- The proposed area contains 5 designated linear wildlife openings, established in the early 1990's, maintained by sportsmen through the NC Wildlife Resource Commission as hunter access, and is closed to bikes and horses. These linear wildlife openings include: Long Lobe, Charles Creek and Cagle Mountain.
- Significant investments in road systems have been made through silviculture and maintained by sportsmen's funds.
- Cedar Rock Mountain is surrounded on the North, South, East and West sides with roads of a working forest, with many habitat improvements and continued active forest management.

Ellicott Rock Extension – 834 acres

- Grouse Focal Areas is in this region, along with a grouse drumming survey route that runs along FS 1178
- Timber sale activity occurred around FS 4568, where a wildlife food plot is currently. FS 4563, and the food plots surrounding it, were reseeded within the last two years
- There is one linear wildlife opening within the boundary and another that runs along the northeast edge
- Good management potential here, as the northern section has been harvested in the past, and has good access and infrastructure in place
- About 25% road access, with chestnut restoration, TNC active restoration targets and white pine needs within this region

Linville Gorge Extension – 2,844 acres

- 75 % of this area is in poor forest condition (SLID), with less than 100 acres of pine plantations. Potential for restoration work throughout this area.
- Unit boundary is the blue gravel road and is the lower containment line for all Linville Gorge wildfire activities – need to keep this open and accessible.
- Units outside the area are part of the shortleaf pine restoration study, which incorporate multiple timber harvest activities and habitat work. Units within the addition have been replanted to shortleaf pine after fire activities. This unit has great habitat currently and will need future management to continue the work that has begun.

Total wilderness extension recommendations – 25,864 acres

These comments and assessments are a compilation of much “on-the-ground” work of many, many unsung heroes. Folks that live, work, and play on these forestlands – many mountain natives and true conservationists in every sense of the word; not based on any kind of “model”, but inventories and intense study of each area mentioned. Many of these people fundamentally believe that our publicly-owned forestlands can and should be actively managed for the benefit of man, his enterprises, and his recreational pursuits; while simultaneously creating a mix of diverse habitat for the many forest creatures. Our watersheds, wildlife, recreation and range are immensely improved through scientific, and sustainable management of our forests. I urge careful consideration and caution of any permanent designation or action that will restrict the ability to work and play within our federal lands. Flexibility and creative thinking will be required to steward these lands for the next generation, as our forum ecozone model show over 800,000 acres of the NPNF to be at 71 years and older as it stands today.

With increased invasive species on the march, insect infestations running rampant, the many demands of a growing population, oak decline, changing climate patterns, the “lungs of our earth” in the form of our forests are even more critical: in carbon sequestration, water cycle improvements, and the myriad of products they supply that we depend upon daily. From solid wood products abundant in our homes and furnishings, to paper products, aspirin, crayons, hairspray, diapers, cinnamon, ice cream, and the list goes on and on – trees are the gift that keeps on giving. Let’s please tread carefully as we look to this forest plan and the many that come afterward, to not unintentionally hand-cuff us from taking care of that which we inherited in public trust. These lands were sold, at a hugely discounted price, with “forest conservation” at the root. Please use scientific study, historical data and the counsel of experts in the field of forest health when making decisions for the “greatest good”, rather than making plans based on social science. We need to be pro-active, rather than reactive when shaping our plans for the future and we need to think big!

Respectfully submitted, Susan Fletcher

