**Stakeholders Forum Data Listening Session**

June 10, 2016

Participants: Holly Stratton, Susan Parker, Zachary Lesch-Huie, Levi Rose, Curtis Smalling, Jon Hallemeier, Phil Elliott, Michelle Aldridge, Jim Gray, Ryan Jacobs, Hugh Irwin, Gary Kauffman, Karl Buchholz, Erik Crews, Cathy Dowd, Susan Fletcher, Robin Ramsey, Brady Dodd, Larry Hayden (facilitator), Heather Luczak (notes)

Michelle – overview of the management area process. In 2015 the FS worked on management areas. In late 2015, the Forum had discussions around general forest management. Result of Forum discussions was three MA distinctions – frontcountry, midcountry, backcountry (similar to MA 1, 2, and 3).

Today’s meeting objective - Is there any other spatial information that we should be using from the Forum in the integration of the MA discussion? Need to recognize that there are multiple pieces of information that need to be considered for any piece of the forest.

**Presenters should address the following topics during presentations**

* Characterize the data
* How was it obtained
* What data sources were used
* Why are you bringing the data forward today?

**Presentations**

**Curtis Smalling – Audubon Society**

* Map packages and raw data will be left with FS
* Canopy closure
* Canopy coverage at the 100m scale – USGS product
* The role of the FS ownership is where a majority of canopy closure is in western NC
  + 80% closure – indicator as good canopy for forest interior birds
  + Canopy retention should be encouraged on parcels with high edge to non-FS
* Forest Loss and Gain 2002-2013
* The most canopy loss was in existing wilderness – mostly due to fire in the Linville Gorge
* Parcels Evaluated for Closed Canopy Species Using SE GAP Habitat Suitability Models
* Parcels Evaluated for Open Canopy Species Using SE GAP Habitat Suitability Models
* Regional Breeding Bird Data
* Looking at where the hotspots are with the highest abundance of certain species
* Useful for project specific planning

**Jim Gray – Ruffed Grouse Society**

* There is a correlation between the amt of habitat created and grouse populations
* Wildlife considerations – decline in wildlife abundance, managed habitat is low
* Potential listing of grouse as a Species of Concern by USFWS as grouse continue to decline
* Increasing “Natural Areas” would decrease ideal grouse habitat
* Siler Bald (audible gunshots from Dirty John Gun Range)
* Tellico Bald – location for the Appalachian Ruffed Grouse book
* Chunky Gal – 71D road – very nice meadow area, prime ruffed grouse hunting
* Cowee Bald/Big Laurel – grouse survey area for drumming counts, excellent high elevation ESH potential

Recommendations

* + Reconsider NAP map layer. Treat “NAP” layer as organization input only, not from the Forum as a whole
  + Get detailed map input across the entire forest
  + Request ½ mile buffer on all linear wildlife openings

**Hugh Irwin – TWS and SELC**

* Sampled conditions on roads within Mountain Treasures Area
* Road prioritization was based on a road risk analysis of NP roads previously…..
* Roads at high risk were of particular interest
* ML 1,2, 3 roads within the MTAs were prioritized
* Focused on BMP failures
* 45 of 120 prioritized roads were surveyed across all districts
* Photos were taken at all sites (~1500 field photos)
* Relevance – 1) a guide for plan components so that BMP failures and road maintenance deficits can be systematically addressed throughout implementation of Forest Plan; 2) to identify backcountry areas of the forest where the road system has not been adequately maintained so that mgmt. allocation is most effective and efficient.
* Most roads in this study were ML 2, some were ML 1
* Most roads in the study had not been maintained in decades, or at least a number of years
* One rationale of the study was to show that the road maintenance budget is a systemic problem

**Ryan Jacobs – NCWRC**

Restoration Analysis

Identified restoration opportunities on the Forest – use of FSVeg data

* Plantations – loblolly, white pine
* Virginia pine stands
* Fire adapted stands – shortleaf, pitch pine
* Spruce
* Chestnut
* Departed ecozones
* Uncharacteristic poplar
* Uncharacteristic white pine
* Priority oak regeneration – stands where the FS has made previous investments to manage for oak regeneration
* SLID – sparse, low quality, low site index, insect and disease stands

Conclusion - there are a lot of restoration opportunities across the forest

Commission has restoration opportunity acreage calculations for each of the identified WHAMAs

**Jim Gray, presenting for David Whitmire- FWCC**

* FWCC supports WHAMAs as presented by the Forum map committee, but this is only a small portion of the forest where there are wildlife concerns
* Roads are crucial for other things besides wildlife – fire rescue, access
* Presented a map of wildlife fields, roads, and linear wildlife fields with 2,000’ buffer
  + Assumption that most hunters hunt within 2,000’ of road

**Zachary Lesch-Huie – Access Fund**

* Nantahala and Pisgah NFs climbing areas
* Geographically displayed climbing locations vs climbing areas
* Climbing locations (Points) and access trails were buffered by 1 mile to create the climbing areas
* Why 1 mile buffer? Looked at how recreational resources are protected nationally – NRA trails are buffered 1 mile. One mile was adequate to contain the entirety of the climbing system
* What was used for access trails? FS system trails
* Interest in maintaining access within the climbing areas and seeking input from the climbing community on project proposals

*Presentations will be made available on the Stakeholders Forum website*