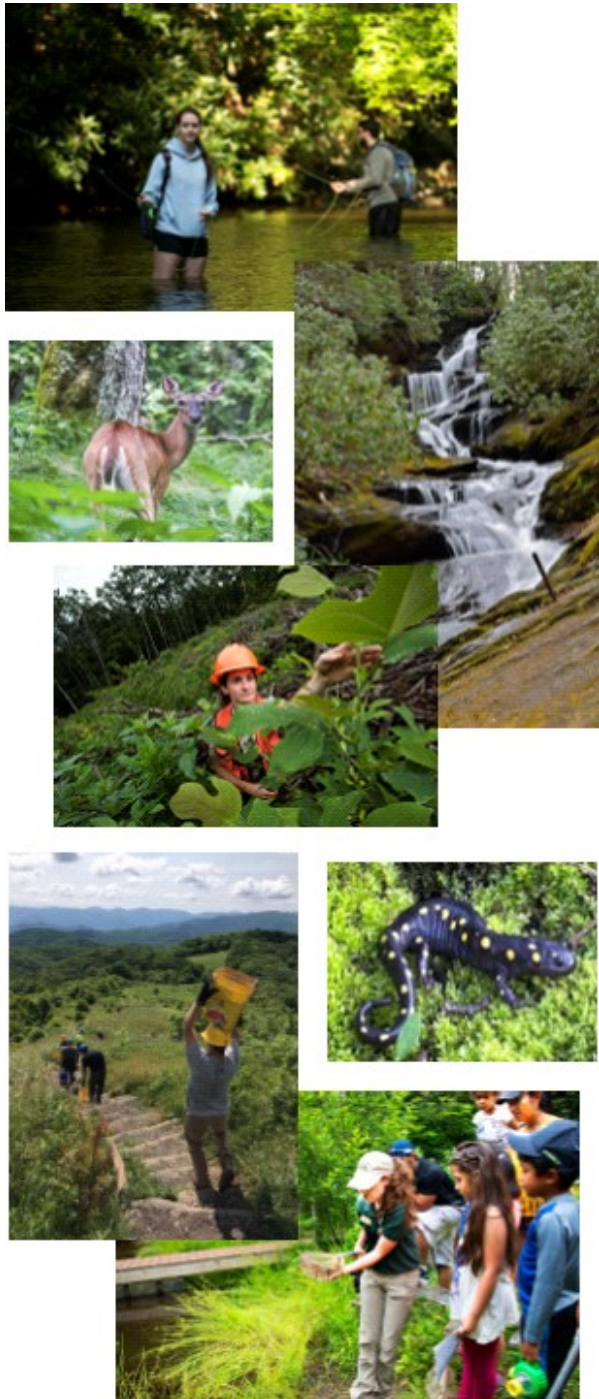


Nantahala and Pisgah Forest Plan Revision Reader's Guide



Greetings forest user,

The U.S. Forest Service has revised the land management plan for the Nantahala and Pisgah National Forests. The forest plan provides a strategic framework for the next 20 years. The plan includes desired conditions and goals for the future of the Forests and objectives that describe actions the Forest Service will take to move toward those goals.

The plan positions the Nantahala and Pisgah NFs to address the challenges that we anticipate in the years ahead, such as the growth of wildland urban interface; the spread of insects, disease, and invasive species; development pressure on adjacent private lands; unprecedented increase in recreation; and the escalating impacts from climate change. In this time of accelerated change, ensuring our forest ecosystems are healthy and resilient is critical to long-term sustainability of the diverse habitats these forests provide for wildlife and plants, and for supplying the clean water and other ecosystem benefits that we all depend on.

In addition to the final plan, we are releasing an environmental analysis of the plan, called an Environmental Impact Statement. This Reader's Guide provides an overview of these documents with references for more information.

This plan was developed and shaped by extensive public input. We worked with diverse interests to build a broadly supported and implementable forest plan that will connect people to the land; restore forest resiliency, forest health, and wildlife habitat; provide clean and abundant water; support recreation and local jobs; and provide a platform for working together toward shared goals.

We encourage you to reach out to organizations who have been involved in the process and that represent your interests to see how your interests have been incorporated.

-The Nantahala and Pisgah Plan Revision Team
January 2022

What will the final plan enable?

The Plan will:

- ◇ **Recognize and contribute to multiple uses of the Forest Service mission** including timber harvest, recreation, wildlife, water and wilderness.
- ◇ **Improve forest health and resiliency.** increase the pace and scale of restoration above current levels; maintain and improve the diversity of forest vegetation especially young forest, open forest, and oldgrowth conditions; increase management activity using silviculture and fire as tools; and control invasive species.
- ◇ **Improve or maintain wildlife habitat conditions** for the wildlife species that depend on the forest, including federally listed species and species of conservation concern, rare and unique habitats, resident and migrant game species, pollinators, birds, bats, fish, and more.
- ◇ **Contribute to clean and abundant water** by sustaining surface water and groundwater flows, protect water quality, maintain fish and wildlife habitat, control erosion, restore streams and streamside zones, and continue to sustain forests as a source of drinking water to communities in Western NC.
- ◇ **Improve the Forests' world class recreation opportunities** for year-round outdoor play and exercise. The plan will provide for both developed and dispersed recreation on land and water, from an outdoor multiple use trail system to indoor facilities, ensuring opportunities and sites are sustainable.
- ◇ **Enable forest access**, including for hunting, fishing and gathering of forest products, as well as providing for the needs of Federally recognized Tribes.
- ◇ **Contribute to local economies** by collaboratively providing resources, improvements to infrastructure, sustainable levels of renewable forest commodities that contribute to local businesses, tourism, and sustainable community growth.
- ◇ **Sustain the Forests' scenic beauty and cultural resources**, enabling the forest to remain a destination for spiritual renewal and connecting to our shared history.
- ◇ **Continue to manage existing administrative and Congressionally designated areas which will not be changed during revision.** These areas include:
 - National Scenic & Historic Trails, such as the Appalachian Trail and the Trail of Tears*
 - Congressionally designated Wilderness*
 - Wild & Scenic Rivers*
 - Inventoried Roadless Areas*
 - Roan Mountain*
 - Wilderness Study Areas*
 - Experimental Forests Research*
 - Natural Areas Cradle of Forestry Historic Site*
- ◇ **Recommend land allocations in the following three areas:**
 - Recommended Wilderness*
 - Eligible Wild and Scenic Rivers*
 - Special Interest Areas*
- ◇ **Recognize the value of partners in shaping our shared future**, identify how other agencies, government and non-government partners, volunteers and visitors contribute to sustaining these National Forests, and will identify and help facilitate additional opportunities to work together for shared goals.
- ◇ **Be inclusive of input from the public, governments, Federally Recognized Tribes, and best available science.** The plan is developed with input from the public and future planning and projects will be undertaken in collaboration with the public. The Forest Service will continue to collaborate with the public on implementing the revised plan.

The Revised Plan will not: Decide the future of a particular trail, road, recreation site, or project design; make any leasing decisions about oil and gas resources; or authorize activities to take place on the forest. (All future projects must be analyzed prior to implementation).

How is the revised plan different from the current plan?

The original plan is almost 35 years old, signed in 1987 and significantly amended in 1994. The plan has had several smaller amendments since 1994.

The revised plan will be poised to accelerate the achievement of our shared goals because:

- It establishes a clear vision for each ecological community on the forest
- It emphasizes forest places and uses that are important to people.
- It identifies an additional tier of work beyond current Forest Service capacity that may be accomplished with the help of partners.
- It builds on thousands of ideas that citizens, organizations, and governments shared during plan development.
- It ensures that all interests benefit from the implementation of our multiple use mission.

Below are some ways the revised plan shifts our management that will set the trajectory for years to come, serving as a model for forests that follow.

Ecosystem-based approach: Unlike the previous plan that framed activities in terms of outputs and traditional standards and guidelines, the revised plan developed desired conditions for each ecological community. By using ecological communities, projects will consider needs across a broader landscape, better enabling an increase in pace and scale of restoration.

Recognizes the importance of place: The revised plan places a much greater emphasis on the way people use the forest - the places and uses that are important to people. The plan is divided into 12 geographic areas that outline goals for connecting people to the land in different parts of the forest and discusses opportunities for working across boundaries with neighboring lands. This chapter reflects the interests we heard from thousands of public comments, as reflecting the interest of local residents and governments.

Collaborative capacity: The plan identifies objectives for the next 10 years at two tiers: one if existing FS capacity continues, and a second tier if we are able to garner additional capacity in the form of help from others. By outlining what we could do with the help of others we hope to incentivize shared stewardship and build partnerships to achieve more work on the ground.

Traditional ecological knowledge and tribal values: This land has been managed by the Forest Service for just over 100 years, while tribal connections in Western North Carolina extend to time immemorial. The Forest plan honors and redeems our trust responsibility to tribes, recognizing tribes and tribal members as partners in managing the national forest, and valuing traditional ecological knowledge and places of tribal significance.

Unprecedented public involvement: The planning process has involved an unprecedented amount of public engagement, which is intended to set the stage for future involvement in project design. The plan has a section on public involvement and a guideline to facilitate collaboration and meaningful public participation during preparation of integrated landscape projects, except in emergency situations.

Adaptive to 21st century challenges: The plan sets an adaptive framework to address 21st century challenges we see on the horizon: impacts of development pressure on adjacent private lands; unprecedented increase in recreation; the growth of wildland urban interface; the spread of insects, disease, and invasive species; and the impacts from climate change. The plan also enables adaptation to challenges we can't yet anticipate – creating a monitoring program that will allow us to regularly evaluate our actions, gauge our progress toward long-term goals, and modify our approach where needed.

Moving Forward Together

We are grateful to the thousands of members of the public who shared their input in the development of this plan. As a result of diverse public input, this plan provides a strong foundation for addressing the challenges ahead of us, while moving all our interests forward. The plan's strong emphasis on public involvement provides a platform for us to work together in the years to come.

Here's a **sample** of how public input helped shape every page of the plan:



We hope you will continue to stay engaged as we implement and monitor the new plan —this is where our work together really begins.

Steps to a final Plan

Now that the final Plan, final Environmental Impact Statement and draft Record Of Decision have been released, there is one more step before a final decision is signed. Members of the public who have been engaged in the revision process have an opportunity to file an objection before the final decision is approved. Documents will be available for public review on the National Forests in North Carolina Forest website. The 60-day objection period begins with the publication of the legal notice in the Asheville Citizen Times. The regulations do not allow for extending the objection period.

Who can object? Individuals and entities that submitted substantive formal comments during earlier comment periods are eligible to file an objection. The objection must be based on the same concerns raised in earlier comments unless it concerns an issue that arose after the last formal comment period.

What happens next? The Regional Forester will review objections and work to resolve them. He will issue a written response that may include additional direction for the Forest Supervisor to include in the final plan. The Regional Forester's written response is the final decision, and the Forest Supervisor can now approve the new plan and begin implementation.

For more information, see the NC Plan Revision website at www.fs.usda.gov/goto/nfsnc/nprevision