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Regarding Nantahala and Pisgah NFs Plan Revision #43545

Dear Ms. Luczak,

I respectfully request that you recommend Lost Cove and Harper Creek for wilderness designation in the Pisgah/Nantahala forest plan revision process that is currently underway. As you know, this has been the recommendation of the U.S. Forest Service since 1987 and there is nothing that would justify changing this recommendation in the new plan. As previous plans have noted about these areas:

1. Present uses are compatible with Wilderness values.
2. They contain mature, hardwood forests with pockets of old growth.
3. Streams are of good quality and support a wild trout fishery.
4. From the Parkway, the entire basin may be viewed as a rugged area of unbroken forest throughout and beyond to other National Forest System lands.
5. They are adjacent to and accessible from the Blue Ridge Parkway.
6. Steep, rugged terrain and variety of vegetation provide high degree of challenge and risk.
7. Wilderness designation would favor habitat for species preferring older forests.
8. Linville Gorge (which reaches capacity during peak summer months) is 10 miles to the southwest.
9. There are major population centers within 250 miles.

Lost Cove and Harper Creek are among the few areas remaining in the Grandfather Ranger District with excellent wilderness potential and they are among the most popular backcountry recreation spots for people living in Boone, Blowing Rock, Banner Elk, Lenoir, Hickory, Marion, Morganton and nearby towns.

In addition to Lost Cove and Harper Creek, I urge you to recommend the Craggy Mountain WSA and the Snowbird and Overflow Creek WSAs in the Nantahala National Forest for wilderness designation as well, as these areas contain similar characteristics that make them suitable for wilderness designation.

When Congress passed the Wilderness Act in 1964, it stated, "In order to assure that an increasing population, accompanied by expanding settlement and growing mechanization, does not occupy and modify all areas within the United States and its possessions, leaving no lands designated for preservation and protection in their natural condition, it is hereby declared to be the policy of the Congress to secure for the American people of present and future generations the benefits of an enduring resource of wilderness."

However, to date, less than one third of one percent of North Carolina's land area has actually been designated wilderness. To put that in perspective, if North Carolina were a 1,500 square foot house, the amount set aside for wilderness would be smaller than a linen closet!

Finally, as a general matter, I believe that all existing old-growth forest designations in the Pisgah and Nantahala from the last Forest Plan should be considered unsuitable for timber production and that all remaining areas with high potential for wilderness should be designated as wilderness study or backcountry management areas.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sandra Aiken
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