

Date submitted (UTC-11): 11/2/2016 2:13:14 PM

First name: Deby

Last name: Hodges

Organization:

Title:

Official Representative/Member Indicator:

Address1:

Address2:

City:

State:

Province/Region:

Zip/Postal Code:

Country:

Email: pawsfurme@yahoo.com

Phone:

Comments:

Big Ivy area in the Pisgah National Forest

Dear U.S. Forest Service,

I support wilderness recommendation for most of Big Ivy and backcountry management recommendation for Big Ivy's trail network.

Big Ivy's recommended wilderness should extend from Snowball Mountain to Coxcomb Mountain, encompassing all of the lands in the Forest Service wilderness inventory except the trail network and Forest Road 74.

Big Ivy offers some of the best opportunities for primitive recreation and solitude in Pisgah National Forest. The rugged, remote peaks and ridges have challenging trails that are lightly traveled, with unnamed waterfalls cascading across many of its slopes. Surrounded by 100,000 acres of contiguous wildlands, Big Ivy is an ideal location for wilderness.

Big Ivy is one of the most significant areas of biological diversity on public lands in Southern Appalachia. The 13,968-acre Big Ivy section of Pisgah National Forest is part of the highest mountain range east of the Mississippi River. It contains the third-highest density of rare species on the Pisgah-Nantahala and over 3,000 acres of old-growth forest, one of the largest patches of old-growth in the East. Part of a 100,000-acre block of protected lands-one of the largest in the East-Big Ivy is a rare and precious living legacy, with big trees, big mountains, and big waterfalls.

Big Ivy's pristine headwaters are home to native trout and part of the protected watershed of the Ivy River, an important tributary of the French Broad and drinking water source for the towns of Weaverville and Mars Hill. Big Ivy's wild forests shelter dozens of rare plants and animals, and its diverse array of habitats shelter at least 44 rare species documented in the area. Big Ivy has some of the healthiest and mature forests in the Pisgah-Nantahala and was identified by The Nature Conservancy as one of the most important core forests in the Southern Blue Ridge. It also contains numerous high-elevation cliff and rock exposures that shelter rare and endangered flora and fauna.

One of the most important features of Big Ivy is the amount of remaining old-growth. Over 3,000 acres of old-growth have been documented in Big Ivy, and the mature forests surrounding these areas act as buffers and corridors for a number of species.

The abundance of fallen logs and dead snags are extremely valuable habitat to numerous species and provide critical floral and faunal components, both in providing nutrients and structure. Mature oak forests in Big Ivy provide a reliable fall mast crop for black bears and other species.

Big Ivy contains high-quality examples of several key natural communities, including Rich Cove Forest, Boulderfield Forest, High Elevation Red Oak, High Elevation Seep, Montane White Oak, Montane Oak-Hickory, Northern Hardwood Forest, and Spruce-Fir Forest.

The upper portions of Big Ivy show interesting patterns of spruce dispersal relative to wind patterns and has interested climate scientists studying the effects of climate change. It is theorized that 4,000 years ago during the warming of the hypsithermal period, no spruce existed in this area below 6,000 feet.

Unique underlying geology has created unusually rich conditions over much of the area, which has been conducive to a high number of flora and fauna. Much of this native diversity has been retained due to a relative lack of human disturbance and low road density.

Most of Big Ivy contains underlying geology that creates circumneutral soils that are extremely rare for Southern Appalachia. The geological type is described by the North Carolina Geologic Survey as metagraywacke, inter-layered and gradational with mica schist, muscovite biotite gneiss, and rare graphitic

schist. It is known to exist in only in this area of the state, covering a generally circular area around the Black, Craggy, and Swannanoa Mountains.

The Southern Appalachians are considered a center for salamander species diversity. Most families of salamanders are located here than anywhere else in the world. The mature forests in Big Ivy provide cool, moist conditions and are known to contain a very high diversity and abundance of salamanders, including rare species.

Big Ivy is one of the most popular and important recreation destinations in Southern Appalachia. Its prized trout streams, wildlife, waterfalls, swimming holes, rugged trails, and scenic overlooks attract thousands of outdoor enthusiasts annually.

It is an essential part of the Blue Ridge Parkway viewshed and provides outstanding scenery. The protected, intact forests of Big Ivy have important value in maintaining regional air and water quality and mitigating the effects of climate change.

Big Ivy's cascading creeks and waterfalls, old-growth forests, and panoramic vistas are legacies to be protected for future generations. Local families have used Big Ivy to hunt, fish, hike, camp, and swim for over two centuries. Expanding the Craggy Mountain Wilderness in Big Ivy will safeguards traditional local uses of the land and expand opportunities for primitive recreation and solitude.

All of Big Ivy except for its existing trail system and Forest Road 74 should be recommended for wilderness designation.

Big Ivy's rugged and remote character, untrammeled forests, unique habitats and ecosystems (including extensive spruce-fir forests, rich cove forests, and old growth forests), 44 rare and endangered species, drinking water protections and water quality, and its outstanding opportunities for solitude and primitive recreation make it ideal for wilderness recommendation.

Big Ivy has important botanical, zoological, geologic, scenic, and recreational resources. Its unique attributes are currently under-represented across the Pisgah-Nantahala. A wilderness designation for most of Big Ivy would protect the unique attributes intrinsic to the area.

We also advocate the existing trail network to be assigned Backcountry / Management Area 3. Including Big Ivy's trail network in a Backcountry Management Area would ensure that all current recreational uses of the forest continue, including mountain biking. It would prohibit commercial logging and road building, prioritize recreation, and enhance the long-term biological health of the area, including its drinking water supply, and its scenic, scientific, cultural, and natural resources.

Big Ivy's wilderness and protection of its backcountry trail network are supported by a broad coalition of local, regional, and national organizations. The local Big Ivy community overwhelmingly supports the proposed expansion of wilderness in Big Ivy.

Thank you for including most of Big Ivy in your wilderness inventory. I wholeheartedly support wilderness recommendation for most of Big Ivy and backcountry recommendation for its trail network.

Sincerely,

Debra Hodges  
Newton, North Carolina  
828-464-5676  
pawsfurme@yahoo.com