

Date submitted (UTC-11): 8/7/2017 1:03:55 AM

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Comments:

wilderness inventory/plan revision

Good Morning Forest Stewards,

I enjoyed going to Mars Hill University a few weeks ago to learn more about the new forest plan. Thank You for a great presentation of material. During this planning time I will be making comments on areas of interest.

I am writing today to encourage the USFS to expand the Wilderness System in the Pisgah and Nantahala forests. As a resident of Madison County I am specifically going to comment on the Appalachian Ranger District.

I was looking at the Wilderness Inventory areas in the plan revision info and believe that the proposed "Bald Mountain" , "Black Mountain" and the "Craggy Mountain" areas are all worthy of adding to the system for many reasons:

Permanent protection of the last roadless areas are vital to the health of our communities and to the American character which is completely tied into the natural landscape. While American character perhaps does not have a measureable economic value it is of utmost importance to protect the last remaining wild areas in perpetuity, through congressional designation. Madison County, NC likes to boast about its abundant Natural Resources and we need the USFS help to keep our Wildest places Wild. I recently hiked with a man from Germany who specifically came to the Southern Appalachian area to experience hiking in "Wild" Wilderness. Places across the globe have lost their Wilderness. In a time when the global landscape is almost totally domesticated we should take this great opportunity to protect every last piece that has the potential to offer roadless, wild, untrammled Wilderness.

The "Bald Mountain" (aka Shelton Laurel) area is one of the wildest places I know within 500 miles. This quiet, little used, and little known "back country" area is currently wilder than many congressionally designated Wilderness areas. This area needs Wilderness designation to protect it from future outside pressures from development and over use. The Bald Mountain/ Shelton Laurel Area with its shared boundary with the Appalachian Trail, the Cherokee National Forest and Rocky Fork State Park offers a unique opportunity to create one of the biggest roadless areas in the East. Take this opportunity to encourage agency cooperation across state lines and create a natural treasure for the people.

Organizations and citizens are eager to participate in projects that protect the Wilderness character of the wild places in our National Forest. No doubt, by designating these areas as "Wilderness", opportunities will be lost for managing them with the convenience of mechanized tools. While the Carolina Mountain Club and the ATC may lose their ability to maintain the trails in this area with motorized tools there are other options for the USFS to partner with other groups that support Wilderness. For example the Southern Appalachian Wilderness Stewards SAWS have the ability to maintain access and trails into Wilderness areas with the least amount of impact. SAWS and other citizens groups can help the forest service monitor and maintain access to these Wilderness areas.

Considering the proposed Wilderness areas within the larger landscape of public and private land it seems

logical to manage for mature untrammled forest. The privately owned land surrounding the national forest offers plenty of highly managed and early successional species habitat for individuals concerned with this topic. The proposed Wilderness Areas in the context of the broader landscape of private land fills the niche for permanently protected mature forest habitat. Some people may offer arguments of management for diverse ages of the forest. I suggest looking beyond the boundary of the public land (as a songbird or a bear would do) and argue that the Forest Service does not need to manage for early successional habitat. The Forest Service should be concerned with how to create a contiguous forest habitat and wildlife corridors for the health of the Southern Appalachian ecosystem where ever possible. Private land owners are doing plenty to fragment the forest and create early successional habitat through logging and development that is often on a shared boundary with the USFS land.

Appeal to the Bear Hunters. Work to get them to understand that managing for Wilderness is in their best interest. This mature forest habitat is great for black bears. Educate the Bear Hunters on their opportunities to hunt black bears in and around Wilderness Areas. Education and Outreach are very important in helping the public understand their role in both protecting the resource and enjoying the bounty that it provides.

Consider the concerns of private landowners who share a land boundary with proposed wilderness areas. Educate them so they do not "fear" wilderness designation. Some land owners are afraid to embrace wilderness because they fear it will encourage nosey tourists coming through and disrupting their peace. Let them know that Wilderness Designation is a quiet move for permanent protection. No highway signs, or media blitz should be allowed when creating a new Wilderness Area.

Thank you for all the work you do and please support Wilderness designation whenever possible.

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