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National Forest Service 15 yr Plan

Please consider my families desires as hikers and users of our National Forests!

- * Backcountry hiking trails should be given high priority for operation and maintenance.
- * Protect trail corridors. Timbering projects should have minimal impacts to trail corridors and their special characteristics. Hikers should be involved in early planning of timber projects to provide input concerning special characteristics of the trail corridor, appropriate buffers, acceptable temporary disturbance to trail users, notification of road closures, opportunities to educate the public through signage, and opportunities to improve condition of the trail. We also request that FS adequately monitor timber operations to minimize damage and disruption to trails and to enforce provisions of timber contracts concerning protection and rehabilitation of trails.
- * Develop new trails and loop trails, and bring existing trails up to standard.
- * Develop a stronger overall management approach to resolve potential conflicts and safety issues on multi-use trails.
- * Avoid decommissioning trails, and include hiker input when decommissioning is being considered.
- * Create a Recreation Users Council to:
 - * to promote responsible, safe, and sustainable behavior on multi-use trails.
 - * help coordinate trail volunteers to build and maintain a sustainable multi use trail system.
 - * Support recreation that is ecologically, socially, and economically sustainable on the Forests.

We are concerned about safety issues in joint use of trails for hiking and biking. We recommend that the FS better define when trails are appropriate for joint use by hikers and bikers and outline policy for biking and hiking practices for joint use of trails.

Additional considerations include the various experiences hikers expect from the forest: to enjoy solitude and peace away from the hustle of civilization, to enjoy our natural heritage with flower book in hand, to enjoy wildlife viewing, among others.

We believe it is essential that the FS account for the potential impact of climate change on the Pisgah and Nantahala National Forests in developing the Revised Plan. Climate change resilience should be a critical element of the Plan.

- * Protection of high importance trails
- * We would like corridors of regionally important long distance trails given the same or similar protection as the Appalachian Trail. These include the Mountains-to-Sea Trail corridor and the Art Loeb, Benton MacKaye and Bartram long distance trail corridors

Areas Recommended for Wilderness Analysis

We would like special areas be recommended for Wilderness Designation.

Bald Mountain. This would give the A. T. the highest protection.

Daniel Ridge The Art Loeb Trail runs through this area plus the Farlow Gap, Daniel Ridge Loop, and the Cove Creek Trail. Pink Shell Azalea is native only to North Carolina. A large population is found on Pilot Mountain, one of our favorite hikes.

Cedar Rock Mountain In addition to the unique granitic domes, these areas provide a natural landscape and primitive recreation. Butter Gap, Art Loeb, and Cat Gap Loop trails are in the area.

Craggy Mountains Expansion We would like to see the Craggy Mountain Wilderness Study Area expanded north and south with protection for the Big Butt Trail. We would also like to see the Snowball and Shopes Creek areas added to the Big Ivy Special Interest area.

Black Mountains

The Black Mountains Area should be recommended for Wilderness. Great hiking opportunities are available in areas other than the Crest ridgeline. The Mt. Mitchell-Maple Camp Bald Loop follows the MST/ Mt. Mitchell Trail and the Buncombe Horse Range Trail to Maple Camp Bald with its spectacular views. We enjoy CMC's hike #365 Mt. Mitchell Ramble follows the Mt. Mitchell Trail, Buncombe Horse Trail and Mountains-to-Sea Trail in the vicinity of Commissary Hill. We also enjoy other hikes in areas off the Crest including Mt. Mitchell to Black Mountain Campground and the Colbert Ridge Trail. Opportunities for solitude abound on the hikes described above. Although we encounter other hikers, this is infrequent. The same is true for the Crest Trail far enough north from the Mountain Mitchell tourist area. Grass of Parnassus is an attraction that we look forward to seeing in late August and early September. It can be found near the intersection of the Buncombe Horse Trail and the Mount Mitchell Trail. The only other place that we have found Grass of Parnassus in Pisgah National Forest is on the Shining Creek Trail in Shining Creek Wilderness Area.

Pisgah Ledge Geographic Area

We request that most of the Pisgah Ledge Geographic Area (essentially the Pisgah District) be managed as a Special Recreation Area with timbering limited to infrequent projects with the goal of improving forest health. This would give added protection to Art Loeb National Recreation Trail, Black Mountain Trail, Thrift Cove, Coon Tree Loop, Pressley Cove, Perry Cove, Buckhorn Gap and Bennet Gap Trails, in addition to the Butter Gap, Daniel Ridge Loop, Cove Creek, and Farlow Gap Trails. Also, policies addressing trail user safe behavior are needed. We also support utilizing user education and collaboration with multiple trail user groups and improving interactions between users to enhance trail user experience and safety.

Thanks,
Keith

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