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Geographic and Management Plan building blocks

Dear Planners:

The summary of planning efforts on the Nantahala and Pisgah National Forests in the Asheville newspaper was disheartening. The photograph of the mountain biker splashing through a creek and another in the online version of a mountain biker on what looked like an eroded trail didn't seem to be compatible with what the majority of forest users would consider something they'd like to encounter in the forest. Granted, I assume this activity takes place on limited trails in controlled areas. Even the other photo of the rock climber shows an activity that would distract from the view of the mountain for normal folks who would come to the forest to view nature, not someone conquering it as a show.

You can trace this emphasis on forest recreation back to early days when the Park Service and Forest Service fought over recreation. Especially right after the Park Service established Mission 66. The Forest Service has continued to outdo them on recreation. I hesitate to ask, but will: Are there zip lines in the forest? If not, that would be next. Then roller coasters and other amusements to attract crowds.

In passing, timber management was mentioned, mainly to create early successional habitat for wildlife (for hunters). Nowhere did I see a mention of timber management relative to forest health. Or the impact of reduced timber harvesting on wildfire potential. People don't tend to associate that with the East, but the people over in Gatlinburg know full well now what unmanaged park lands can become. The references to local economies seemed more related to outfitters and other "recreation firms" that use the forest as a profit-making resource. I saw scant reference to the timber industry.

I know this is ancient history, long forgotten by current Forest Service employees, but what about the greatest good for the greatest number? I did not see the greatest number as the focus, but the greatest voice from a small group of people with an economic interest in the forest. It was a public process and you have to listen to those who speak, but the groups listed were a small group with a high level of economic self-interest.

There has been long talk about the national forests better being in the Department of the Interior. I have begun to move towards that argument. If national forests are to become national parks, I feel they are better managed and protected by the Park Service. I am not downplaying the importance of forest recreation, but multiple use originally had five uses. I think your planning has lost sight of that.

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