



January 1, 2018

NC Plan Revision
National Forests in North Carolina
160 Zillicoa St., Suite A
Asheville, NC 28801

Plan Revision Team Leader:

We are late for plan revision, but we would like to make some points especially about Carver's Gap to Jane Bald area in the proposed Roan Mountain management area, MA-9.

Tennessee Eastman Hiking and Canoeing Club (TEHCC) maintains the Appalachian Trail from Spivey Gap in TN to TN/VA state line. The one mile section of the AT from Carver's Gap to Engine Gap requires by far the highest quantity of regular maintenance of any of our 134 miles of trail. Part is due to the gravel trail, part is due to the heavy pedestrian traffic. This year we have devoted about 900 hours over nine days with up to 16 volunteers a day. Our volunteers are mostly long time experienced hikers across the U.S. Part of the reason for the even heavier work this year were the heavy rains in late October which damaged the trail.

We are very disappointed in the abuse happening in 2017 on especially Round Bald and Jane Bald with the masses of people. As maintainers one of our objectives is to build a trail good enough that hikers choose to stay on the trail. So we find the situation on the balds to be very frustrating. The damage being done by the off trail walking is the worst we have seen in this area. And it is dramatically worse in 2017.

Those nine outings allowed us to make these observations:

- The balds are loved by many and they especially were out in huge numbers on Black Friday with the good weather. Many vehicles were from Texas, Georgia and many other states. It seemed like >500 people visited and there must have been close to 200 dogs.
- After driving an hour and probably much more, people do not stop to read information on kiosk. Even though some even wait near kiosk for their other group members to get out of vehicles and catch up, they do not read kiosk. We believe the kiosk is a great resource but it is not making a major impact.

- On north side of Round Bald going down to Engine Gap about one third of people took old AT on Black Friday. And seeing others doing it, people think it is okay.
- With crowds like on Black Friday and even on milder days the trail needs to be twice as wide to allow people to meet and pass in groups. One lady had three waist high dogs abreast which took four feet of trail alone. And her friend had two similar sized dogs.
- People are generally friendly and appreciative of this beautiful mountain as well as our work on the trail.

We do not know the best prescribed management plan, but it is becoming obvious some more attempts are drastically needed. We are very supportive of continuing the summer naturalist program, but we cannot expect that program to reach the masses even during the summer. Some higher level agreed possibilities include:

- There is a need for some limited signage to encourage folks to stay on the trail. We really believe many people would try to stay on the trail more if they knew to do so. A well placed sign beside the trail at Carver's Gap and some smaller reminders at common walking places like the old AT junctions could help. This may be complimented with some shorter posts with some boundary cord to indicate that area is off limits.
- On top of Round Bald people are wandering around looking for a destination and making a muddy mess. Perhaps some of this area could also have small reminder signs with short posts and boundary cord.
- Maybe physically limiting parking or eventually computer registration will be required to reduce the influx of people.

There is a portion of visitors who are rebels and will not follow any management practice less than serious fines. But we must be searching for ways to encourage the majority of visitors to enjoy the area with minimal impact.

We strongly support USFS and its partners developing a visitor use management plan for the Roan MA to mitigate the growing recreational impacts.

Sincerely,



Carl Fritz
Appalachian Trail Projects Coordinator
Tennessee Eastman Hiking & Canoeing Club

cc: Vic Hasler and Steve Perri , TEHCC; Gary Kauffman and Sue Fruchey, USFS; Morgan Sommerville, ATC; Marquette Crockett, SAHC