

Let the Forest Service Know How We Want Our National Forests Managed – Attend the Open Houses

by Ruth Hartzler

It's time to let the Forest Service know how we want our National Forests managed. Over the past year, the Forest Service has been developing an amazingly comprehensive revision to the Nantahala-Pisgah Forests Management plan. As part of this process, the Forest Service is holding open houses across our region. You are invited to discuss your interests one-on-one with District Rangers and key Forest Service staff, and ask any questions that you have. They want to hear what you have to say! Here are some thoughts you might consider. The Appalachian Trail corridor has special protections. We can let the Forest Service know that we also want the Mountains-to-Sea Trail corridor protected in addition to the Art Loeb, Benton MacKaye and Bartram long distance trail corridors.

We enjoy the natural areas where our hiking trails pass. We can request that our trail areas be placed in the Backcountry management area¹. Backcountry is primarily shaped by natural processes. Forest restoration may occur in Backcountry areas, although cutting, sale, or removal of timber in these areas is expected to be infrequent and for ecosystem benefits. We can also ask that, should timber cutting occur in our trail areas, that the trail tread be protected and rehabilitated, and that the timbering process be monitored. We can ask that hikers and other recreation users be involved in project planning.

If you are interested in details, or like to look at maps, here are few details:

Earlier in the planning process, CMC asked that the Daniel Ridge and Cedar Rock Mountain Areas, among other areas, be analyzed for Wilderness designation. These areas are not being considered further for Wilderness by the Forest Service. So, Backcountry is the next best management area to request. CMC also requested the Craggy Mountains/Big Ivy area be moved forward for Wilderness designation. Instead, the Forest Service is considering managing this as a Special Interest Area, where recreation, among other factors would have priority. We can ask that Snowball and Shopes Creek, areas where we hike, be added to the Craggy Mountains Special Interest Area. Panthertown Valley is another favorite hiking area where the Backcountry management area is appropriate. All these areas have desirable ecological attributes, in addition to being great for hiking.

Add your favorite hiking areas to the list and let the Forest Service know you would like these areas in Backcountry.

The Forest Service Plan Revision website contains maps showing how management areas are spread across geographic areas of the forests. *This is the latest Forest Service thinking, not a fleshed-out plan.* There is lots more information. <https://www.fs.usda.gov/detail/nfsnc/home/?cid=fseprd491137> Scroll down to Chapter 4 to see maps. Chapter 3 describes the various management areas. You can also find plan components on forest topics from geological resources and terrestrial ecozones to rare habitats, and of course, recreation.

Over the past year, members of CMC's Conservation Committee have spent many long hours working with two collaborative groups, the Stakeholders Forum and the Nantahala Pisgah Forest Partnership, to provide input to the Forest Service. However, **your participation and input is what really counts.** Members of CMC's Conservation Committee will be attending the Pisgah District and Appalachian District open houses. See you there!

If you have any questions, email Ruth Hartzler ruthmtn@gmail.com.

Each District Open House will highlight areas within that district.

- July 13, 6-8 p.m.: Pisgah Ranger District Office, 1600 Pisgah Hwy, Brevard
- July 25, 3-6 p.m.: Appalachian Ranger District at Appalachian District Office, 632 Manor Road, Mars Hill
- July 11, 6-8 p.m.: Nantahala Ranger District at Tartan Hall, 26 Church St., Franklin
- July 25, 3-6 p.m.: Cheoah Ranger District at Cheoah District Office, 1070 Massey Branch Road, Robbinsville
- August 8, 3-6 p.m., Tusquitee Ranger District, Brasstown Community Center, [255 Settawig Rd.](#), [Brasstown](#)

¹ Management Areas are like city zoning. The Management Area chosen for a particular place in the forest is based on the level of human activity, access, forest restoration goals, level of active management, such as timber cutting and fire, and recreation opportunities, among other factors.