

Sothern Appalachian Plant Society ■ Back Country Horsemen of Blue Ridge

December 7, 2015

James Melonas, Interim Forest Supervisor  
National Forests in North Carolina  
160 Zillicoa St. Suite A  
Asheville, NC 28801

Dear Supervisor Melonas,

We, the undersigned, and stakeholders of the Nantahala-Pisgah National Forests, are working together to develop recommendations concerning management of key areas of the forest. This working group of stakeholders represents a broad range of interest groups, some of whom have traditionally been at odds concerning issues of forest management. We have come to agreement on the following:

We recognize the exceptional backcountry and wilderness values provided by the unroaded areas of the Nantahala and Pisgah National Forests, including solitude, scenic integrity, water quality, wildlife habitat, cultural traditions, and outdoor recreation, and recognize the increasing demand for backcountry and wilderness experiences and the vital contribution of these values to the sustainability of local economies surrounding the Nantahala-Pisgah National Forest.

We recognize that some management including logging for restorative purposes may be appropriate in areas to meet the needs of recreational users, including game and fishery habitat enhancements. However, we feel the above mentioned values make these places unsuitable for commercial timber production.

We recognize in particular that the Harper Creek and Lost Cove Wilderness Study Areas offer outstanding opportunities for solitude and recreation, hunting and fishing, and excellent water quality. We recognize the suitability of these areas for many forms of recreation and further acknowledge that planned mountain bicycle, horse, and pack stock use is fully compatible with the protection of those values in perpetuity. We acknowledge that the Harper Creek and Lost Cove Wilderness Study Areas contain nationally renowned rock climbing resources and that climbing is also compatible with the aforementioned values. We agree that access to recreation, hunting, and fishing in this area can be improved and made more sustainable by conducting a trail inventory and sustainability analysis, and that these areas should be protected by the most stringent land-use designation under federal law that would allow for climbing, mountain biking, paddling, and stock use, including Wilderness designations in appropriate areas.

We acknowledge that until a trail inventory and sustainability analysis are complete and Congressional re-designation of these areas occurs, that Harper Creek and Lost Cove will remain Wilderness Study Areas and should continue to be managed to preserve their suitability for Wilderness designation.

We also recognize in particular that even as we lack adequate trail access for all user groups, recreation in the Pisgah and Grandfather Ranger Districts has become a critical component of the local economies and that these areas should be protected and enhanced for the unique recreational opportunities they provide and that trail opportunities should be enhanced for all users.

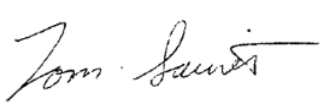
Therefore, in a spirit of cooperation and with a commitment to an ongoing partnership, we agree that the following areas should be managed for a full range of backcountry values that will ensure their individual special characteristics and recreational opportunities are preserved in perpetuity and agree to advocate jointly that:

1. A 57,400-acre Grandfather National Recreation Area, as shown on the attached map, be designated by Congress and, in the meantime, be managed consistent with such future designation by the Forest Service, with an emphasis on scenic values and traditional hunting and fishing uses throughout and an emphasis on recreational opportunities in Upper Wilson Creek, Harper Creek, Lost Cove and the Wilson Creek Wild and Scenic River corridor, and that the Harper Creek and Lost Cove Wilderness Study Areas should be permanently protected to safeguard their backcountry and wilderness values. Other areas in the wilderness inventory should be put into management categories that protect their scenic, recreational, and ecological values: either NRA management that specifically protects these values or in appropriate backcountry, special biological areas, or ecological restoration management. The proposed Grandfather National Recreation Area (GNRA) would also include the 25,500 acre proposed Grandfather National Scenic Area (GNSA). Including the GNSA would allow for management flexibility within the proposed GNRA and provide additional benefits to the public. The acreage that constitutes the GNSA is suitable for multiple use and we support management for ecological integrity and wildlife habitat that does not impact scenic values and recreational experiences. By including the GNSA this proposal would also garner public support as local communities, dozens of businesses, and local governments have supported protection for this area.
2. A 115,573-acre Pisgah National Recreation Area, including inventoried roadless areas, wilderness inventory areas, and Mountain Treasure areas as shown on the attached map, be designated by Congress and, in the meantime, be managed consistent with such future designation by the Forest Service, with an emphasis on diverse, high-quality recreational opportunities including climbing, mountain bike, and horse and pack stock use, hunting, and fishing. Other areas in the wilderness inventory should be put into management categories that protect their scenic, recreational, and ecological values: either NRA management that specifically protects these values or in appropriate backcountry, special biological areas, or ecological restoration management.
3. 109,961 acres, as shown on the attached map, be recommended as Wilderness, managed as recommended Wilderness, and promptly designated by Congress as Wilderness, including the Black Mountains, Craggy Mountains (excluding existing mountain bike routes), Joyce Kilmer-Slickrock Extensions, Linville Gorge Extension, Mackey Mountain, Middle Prong Extension (IRA), Overflow Creek, Shining Rock Extensions (IRA) (excluding Flat Laurel Creek Trail and

spruce restoration areas), Snowbird WSA, Southern Nantahala Extensions, Tusquitee Bald, Ellicott Rock Extension, and Unicoi Mountains (including Cantrell Top). Other areas in the wilderness inventory should be put into management categories that protect their scenic, recreational, and ecological values in appropriate backcountry, special biological areas, or ecological restoration management.

The undersigned further agree to continue to work together and to work with the Forest Service as partners to develop the language to create National Recreation Areas which will provide protection for these special areas while enhancing the varied recreational use. We further agree to work together and with the U.S. Forest Service to support recreational activities and to help provide resources to maintain these activities in a sustainable manner. We support recreational activities in Harper Creek and Lost Cove, including providing resources to complete necessary trail inventories, identifying sustainable trails, plans and sustainable trail networks. We also support resilient climbing resources and establishing a backcountry ranger program and a trail stewardship program comprised of our diverse user groups.

Sincerely,



Tom Sauret, Regional Director  
International Mountain Biking Association



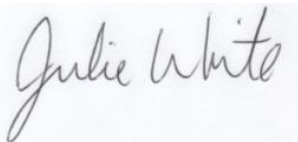
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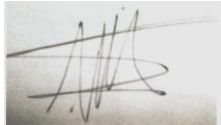
Chris Coney, Co-Owner  
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SIGNATURE NEEDED

Bobby Hand, President  
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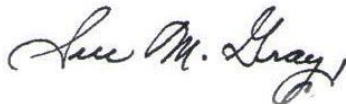
Trent Thomas, Owner  
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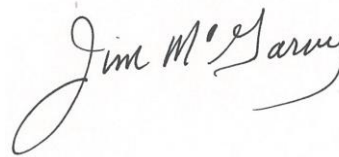
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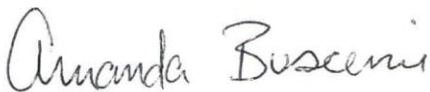
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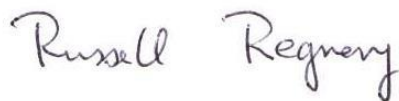
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Back Country Horsemen of Blue Ridge



Tom Thomas, President  
Back Country Horsemen of North Carolina



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Hiwassee River Watershed Coalition



Jean Hunnicutt  
Franklin Bird Club



Karen Laurence  
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