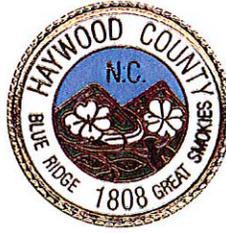


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**HAYWOOD COUNTY CONCERNS
"AREAS PROPOSED FOR ANALYSIS IN THE FOREST PLAN DEIS BY
ALTERNATIVE"**

This is an additional comment to the Resolution of the Board of Haywood County Commissioners dated February 2, 2015, which is attached. The respectful position of Haywood County Board of Commissioners is that no further areas should be designated as wilderness in Haywood County. We acknowledge that there were critical public safety issues that were mitigated in this second revision. We understand that it is critical to the mission of the forest service to conserve forest resources and to examine the use and enjoyment of forest lands by all. It is the most responsible action to keep all tools and options open to manage and conserve resources for present and future generations. We are aware that other designations could protect the forest resources without limiting the ability to manage them to hand tools. We welcome a dialogue on designations for these areas that would impose less restrictive measures on how to conserve. We encourage you to explore such designations for these proposed areas and would reserve our right to comment on such for the appropriate time.

Some general concerns for these areas are that the proposed wilderness designation would: limit the number of individuals that may congregate, impacting church outings and large group hikes; limit the ability of groups to safely build fires and camp in the ways to which they have grown accustomed; over time, will limit the types of areas needed for types of hunting; over time, allow for the growth of certain paths making them less accessible for all terrain vehicles needed in certain rescues; not be in keeping with the present use as these are not the places of extreme solitude and have improvements near them such as roads and blazed and marked trails.

Further, following review of the "Areas Proposed for Analysis in the Forest Plan DEIS by Alternative" (July 2016), we believe the proposed wilderness areas of Graveyard Ridge Extension, Sam Knob Extension and Middle Prong Extension exhibit characteristics that make them unsuitable for wilderness. The proposed expansion of these wilderness areas would decrease positively use and enjoyment as mentioned above. The specific concerns are detailed below.

1. Graveyard Ridge Extension

The Graveyard Ridge Extension is located adjacent to Graveyard Fields, a very popular recreation area just off the Blue Ridge Parkway heavily used by visitors. The area contains permanent structures, including bathrooms and a parking lot. Numerous waterfalls (Photo 1), located only a short distance from the parking lot, draw a large numbers of visitors, especially families seeking a short hike while driving the parkway.

Photo 1: Second Falls



The trailhead from the parking lot is paved (Photo 2) and numerous improvements to the trail (Photos 3, 4) make it easy for visitors, at all levels of hiking ability and preparedness, to access the Graveyard Fields area and its extensive system of trails. The vast majority of these visitors carry no water or outdoor gear and many wear flip flops or similar footwear. Some push strollers.

Photo 2: Graveyard Fields trail system trailhead



Photo 3: Graveyard Fields trail system



Photo 4: Graveyard Fields trail system



The proposed wilderness area contains trails used by casual and often inexperienced hikers. Hikers who enter the Graveyard Fields on blazed and marked trails, will suddenly find themselves continuing on a wilderness trail, posing risk to public safety. Photo 5 shows the heavily used Graveyard Ridge Trail that is located within the proposed extension.

Photo 5: Graveyard Ridge Trail



2. Sam Knob Extension

The Sam Knob Extension is located in an area heavily utilized by visitors, which contains permanent structures (bathrooms) and a parking lot (Photo 6).

Photo 6: Sam Knob Trail parking lot (week day)



The proposed extension is located adjacent to the parking area, along the Sam Knob Summit Trail. Under the proposed plan the right side of this heavily used trail (Photo 7) would be placed in wilderness. This could eventually limit access to the trail by visitors.

Photo 7: Sam Knob Summit Trail



Ivestor Gap Road, which originates at the parking lot appears to fall within the proposed extension. This road is often used for search and rescue missions. Even under the current, less restrictive use management, the road, which lacks a drainage system, can be difficult to pass. Our understanding is that the proposed wilderness designation is on the left. This area is needed to maintain the road.

Photo 8: Ivestor Gap Road



3. Middle Prong Extension

The Middle Prong Extension is located in a heavily visited area; surrounding land uses and transportation infrastructure significantly impact the level of solitude. National Forest Service Road 97 is included in the proposed extension. Current uses along this road include fishing and roadside camping. It is a popular area for large group hikes. (Photo 9).

Photo 9: NSFR 97



The parking lot on NFSR 97 is contiguous to the proposed extension area, and the heavily used road will form the boundary of the area (Photos 10).

Photo 10: Parking lot on south side of NFSR 97 (weekday)



NFSR 97 contains significant roadworks, road maintenance may be negatively impacted by wilderness designation (Photo 11).

Photo 11: NFSR 97



The Middle Prong Extension's opportunities for solitude are limited. During the warmer months there is considerable traffic on NFSR 97. The extension is close to the Cold Mountain Game Lands, and its shooting range, which limits its opportunities for solitude (Photo 12). The shooting range is in operation Tuesday through Saturday from 10:00 AM to 5:30 PM. On a recent afternoon each shooting lane in the range was in use; producing sounds in excess of 140 dB, which are audible in the proposed extension.

Photo 12: Cold Mountain Game Lands Shooting Range



Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Respectfully submitted,

Mark Swanger, Chairman
Haywood County Board of Commissioners

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**RESOLUTION IN OPPOSITION TO
PISGAH NATIONAL FOREST LAND MANAGEMENT PLAN REVISION**

WHEREAS, the United States Forest Service proposes to revise its Land Management Plan and reduce the total number of management areas from 21 to 16, rather than manage the lands for sustainability; and

WHEREAS, the proposed revisions would include the Pisgah National Forest and affect areas of Haywood County; and

WHEREAS, the County of Haywood is concerned that less forest management will negatively impact future search and rescue efforts, and increase their frequency, difficulty and cost, by limiting necessary maintenance to roadways and trails, and reducing necessary signage; and

WHEREAS, the County is concerned that less forest management will negatively impact recreational uses, therefore impacting tourism and the local economy; and

WHEREAS, the County believes that sufficient forest management practices are critical to maintaining a healthy forest ecosystem for native wildlife, which in turn sustains the economic value to the areas as a recreation site.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Haywood County Board of Commissioners do hereby stand in opposition to any additional wilderness/designated areas where land management practices are reduced within Haywood County.

Adopted this 2 day of February, 2015.



Clerk to the Board



Chairman, Haywood County Board of County Commissioners