

**Western North Carolina Public Lands Council  
Meeting Summary  
November 4, 2011  
1:00 – 3:00 PM  
NCDENR Asheville Regional Office  
Swannanoa, NC**

***Members Present: Jason Love, Jonathan Douthit, Tim Nicholson, Delos Monteith, Jason Robinson***

***Others Present: Judy Francis, Greg Yates, Mary Noel, David Anderson, Tom Jackson, Diane Rubiaco,***

I. Welcome

The meeting began at 1:00 EST and all in attendance introduced themselves.

II. Election of Chairman

Jason Robinson made a motion to nominate Jason Love as Chairman of the Council. The motion was seconded by Jonathon Douthit and approved unanimously. Jason Love also affirmed that he will represent the Council on the Mountain Resources Commission.

III. Agency Reports

Mary Noel provided the following report from the U.S. Forest Service:

**Administrative Changes:** Several changes have been announced for the forest:

- Forest Supervisor Marisue Hilliard has announced her upcoming retirement at the end of December. Her Forest Service Career has spanned 32 years with a variety of agency jobs held in different areas of the country. Her retirement party is still in the planning stages.
- The new Pisgah District Ranger is Derek Ibarguen, who comes to NC from the Daniel Boone National Forest in Kentucky. He will start his new position next Monday. Derek began his Forest Service career on the Pisgah National Forest. Prior to the Forest Service, he worked for the Appalachian Trail Conservancy in Asheville.
- Lauren Stull has assumed her position as the new Tusquitee/Cheoah District Ranger. Previously she was the Assistant District Ranger for these two units.

**Restoration Topics:** The next Restoration Steering Team meeting will take place this-coming Monday. Topics will include:

- Creation of a checklist for evaluating priorities during integrated resource assessments.
- Reviewing the summary of accomplishments by the four working groups involved in: controlling the Hemlock woolly adelgid, improving wildlife habitat, combating invasive species, and using prescribed fire.

- How to expand the collaborative role of the Southern Research Station.

Lands News. The high bid received for the old Highlands Office was \$171,000. The sale is expected to close later this month. This parcel includes 1.81 acres of land and a 4,175 sq foot office/dwelling.

Last week the forest acquired a 10-acre tract from the Bartram Trail Association. This inholding, located on the Nantahala Ranger District, includes a key segment of the Bartram trail.

Two tracts in North Carolina's "Threatened Treasures" have options signed and will soon be ready to acquire pending funds being available through the Land and Water Conservation Fund. Mulberry Creek and Backbone Ridge are both located in Caldwell County.

Grandfather Scenic Area Proposal. The forest expects to go out in the next month to gauge public interest in creating a scenic area on the Grandfather Ranger District.

While the decision on creating a scenic area will not be made until the Pisgah/Nantahala Plan is revised (a process set to begin in 2013), feedback on this proposal will help forest managers frame forest plan alternatives.

Cherokee Youth Center. The forest has approved a proposal by the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians (EBCI) to construct and operate a youth center facility for the Snowbird community on approximately 20 acres of national forest land near Robbinsville.

The EBCI plans to build a 15,000 square-foot building, which will meet LEED green building certification, and include a multi-purpose field and an interpretive hiking trail. The youth center is affiliated with the Boys and Girls Club of America. Center organizers hope to offer a variety of programs including Cherokee Language classes, social skills development, cultural craft classes, computer labs, and physical fitness programs. The youth center will serve ages 5 through 18. There are approximately 150 youth already enrolled in programs at the current facility.

New Appalachian Office. Groundbreaking should take place this month for the new Appalachian District Office, located off Future I-26 just north of Mars Hill.

Living Next to National Forests. The forest recently developed a pamphlet that provides answers to the most commonly asked questions by adjacent landowners (along with answers to a few other questions they should be asking). The information currently can be found on the forest website. Once published,

these will be made available to local realtors and relocation groups to best reach new landowners.

Jason Love asked about the significance of a scenic area designation. Mary said that it would place emphasis on scenic resources, but not set in stone rules. They can make the rules to fit the place and what the local desires are, so we need to frame this based on what everyone can agree to.

Mary will send Judy the website link for the "Living Next to the National Forests" information and she will circulate.

Greg Yates – The Division of Forest Resources has been very busy. He apologized for not being able to attend meetings of the council regularly. There was an extended fire season down east. DFR has moved to the NC Dept. of Agriculture and Consumer Services and getting administrative details worked out. DuPont State Forest is being designated as a state recreational forest. Some funding will begin coming through to open a visitor center and address some safety issues near the parking areas. New facilities for the Mt. Holly office are in the works. The aviation program is still in flux with aging aircraft and staff shortages.

Jason Love asked what a state recreational forest designation means. Greg said it specifies that there will be management for recreation in addition to other uses.

Tom Jackson – NC State Parks has had good attendance at their facilities this season. Chimney Rock SP facilities are getting renovated. The elevator is now working. March 1 is the deadline to get things finished there. The state attraction study may result in parks being moved outside of NCDENR. They are looking at revenues, visitation trends, and operating schedules. There are potential problems because they are developing an equation to determine average cost per visitor. That's not a problem for large parks, but tough on state natural areas that get few visitors. There is a chance that Ft. Macon could be moved to cultural resources. The report should be made public next spring, maybe in March. The Council will review and potentially provide comments.

Judy - NCDENR continues to sort out budget issues and redefine priorities given the loss of staff and financial resources. The Raleigh Office has moved into Green Square, a LEED-certified new building. The Mountain Resources Commission is working on a draft of a sustainability index for the region and will do a focused review of the draft at their December meeting. The goal is to have a product ready for the public in early 2012.

David Anderson – Showed brochure about being a Blue Ridge Parkway neighbor. He will ask Phil Francis to bring copies to the next meeting so everyone has a copy. He then gave a PowerPoint presentation (attached) about general management plan process and draft. He passed out CDs and printed

information about the plan and instructions for how to submit comments. Jason Love, Jonathan Douthit, and Jason Robinson will draft comments for the Council to review and approve electronically to submit prior to the December 16 deadline.

IV. NEXT MEETING: January 13, 2012  
Location TBA – Maybe Bent Creek Conference facility.

The 2012 meeting dates are January 13, March 9, May 11, July 13, September 14, and November 9. Jonathan Douthit said he will look into having the May meeting at the Great Smoky Mountain RR in Bryson City. The joint Council meeting in July will be in TN. Jason Robinson said the Council could come to Burnsville in November.

Members will send ideas about 2012 meeting topics to Judy to discuss at January meeting.

V. Adjourn  
Meeting adjourned at 2:40 EST.