



Friends of Panthertown, Inc.
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March 11, 2020

Jackson County Tourism Development Authority
Nick Breedlove, Director
116 Central Street
Sylva, North Carolina 28779

Re: Proposed Land Management Plan for Nantahala and Pisgah National Forests

To the JCTDA Executive Committee,

Thank you for reviewing the position statements of Friends of Panthertown in response to the recently released U.S. Forest Service Proposed Land Management Plan for Nantahala and Pisgah National Forests. We appreciate you looking over the suggested resolution we have prepared for the Jackson County Board of Commissioners in response to the plan, as it relates to Panthertown, and how overall the proposed plan will affect Jackson County tourism and economy for at least the next 10 to 15 years.

Our organization would appreciate having JCTDA take an official position on the proposed forest management plan by submitting your comments to the Forest Service, or by showing your support of our position by adopting a similar resolution to what we have prepared for the Board of Commissioners.

We will continue to be good stewards, promote Leave No Trace principles of outdoor ethics, and protect and maintain this treasured natural resource on behalf of all the visitors and residents of Jackson County.

Signed,

Jason Kimenker
Executive Director

Margaret Carton
President

Mike English
Vice-President Trails

Virginia Willard
Vice-President
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Abbey Bearer
Treasurer

Mike Purdy
Vice-President
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Tony Austin
Trustees

Paul Johnson
Trustee

Mike Kettles
Trustee

Peter Pavarini
Trustee

Margo Purdy
Trustee

Marcia Shawler
Trustee

Wynette Wiles
Trustee

J. Dan Pittillo
Trustee Emeritus

STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
COUNTY OF JACKSON

R20-xx



**RESOLUTION ON THE NANTAHALA AND PISGAH FOREST MANAGEMENT PLAN
AS IT RELATES TO PANTHERTOWN IN JACKSON COUNTY, NORTH CAROLINA**

WHEREAS, the Panthertown Backcountry Complex (“Panthertown”) is located primarily within Jackson County, North Carolina on Nantahala National Forest; and

WHEREAS, the Panthertown Backcountry Complex comprises approximately 9,266 acres of Nantahala National Forest in Jackson County, NC, spanning the National Forest lands from Toxaway Mountain on its southern boundary, to the Tuckasegee River near the mouth of Flat Creek on the northwest boundary and the area known as Bonas Defeat on its northern boundary, depicted in the attached map.

WHEREAS, Panthertown, often referred to as the “Yosemite of the East”, is a valuable natural resource providing extraordinary recreational benefits, cherished by residents and visitors alike, with greater than 35,000 annual visitors; and

WHEREAS, Panthertown features a popular 30-mile backcountry trail system maintained by Friends of Panthertown, and is well known for its treasured, unique biological features, rare high-elevation Southern Appalachian mountain bog; and

WHEREAS, Panthertown contains the pristine headwaters of the East Fork of the Tuckasegee River, including the prized wild and scenic waters of Greenland Creek and Panthertown Creek, as part of the only catch-and-release section of the popular Western North Carolina Fly Fishing Trail®, known for providing world-class fishing and protecting a significant native brook trout population; and

WHEREAS, Panthertown provides residents and visitors of Jackson County with an unparalleled opportunity for outdoor recreation in a backcountry setting; and

WHEREAS, the physical, mental, and spiritual benefits of outdoor recreation are well known and important to the citizens of Jackson County; and

WHEREAS, Panthertown Valley is an attraction for the lucrative tourism economy, outdoor recreation economy, and increases local real estate values; and

WHEREAS, the U.S. Forest Service is in the process of revising a forest management plan for Nantahala and Pisgah National Forests that will provide a strategic framework for managing those lands, including Panthertown, over at least the next 10 to 15 years; and

WHEREAS, the U.S. Forest Service Management Plan will include desired conditions and management areas that will dictate the management direction of Panthertown; and

WHEREAS, backcountry recreation is the primary use of Panthertown, and includes recreational activities such as hiking, mountain biking, horseback riding, backpacking, primitive camping, rock climbing, fishing, hunting, kayaking, and other low-impact recreational activities; and

WHEREAS, these backcountry recreational activities and other uses are enjoyed throughout Panthertown Backcountry Recreation Area Complex within the boundaries on the attached map; and

WHEREAS, these backcountry recreational activities improve the overall health and economy of residents of and visitors to Jackson County. Over \$1.66 Billion was spent by residents of North Carolina's 11th Congressional District on Outdoor Recreation. The 11th Congressional District is home to the Nantahala National Forest, including Panthertown. It is home to more than 80 outdoor companies; fishing, water sports, and camping are the most popular activities according to a 2019 Outdoor Industry Association report; and

WHEREAS, research done by the Jackson County Tourism Development Authority in 2018-19, shows that 10.3-percent of its overnight visitors (n=1,374) and 14.1-percent of its day trip visitors specifically stated they visited Panthertown Valley, or other U.S. Forest Service managed land, on their visit to Jackson County; and

Now therefore let it be known that we resolve that all Jackson County lands within the Panthertown Backcountry Complex are best suited for Special Interest Area and Backcountry Management Area designation under the Nantahala-Pisgah Revised Land and Resource Management Plan; and

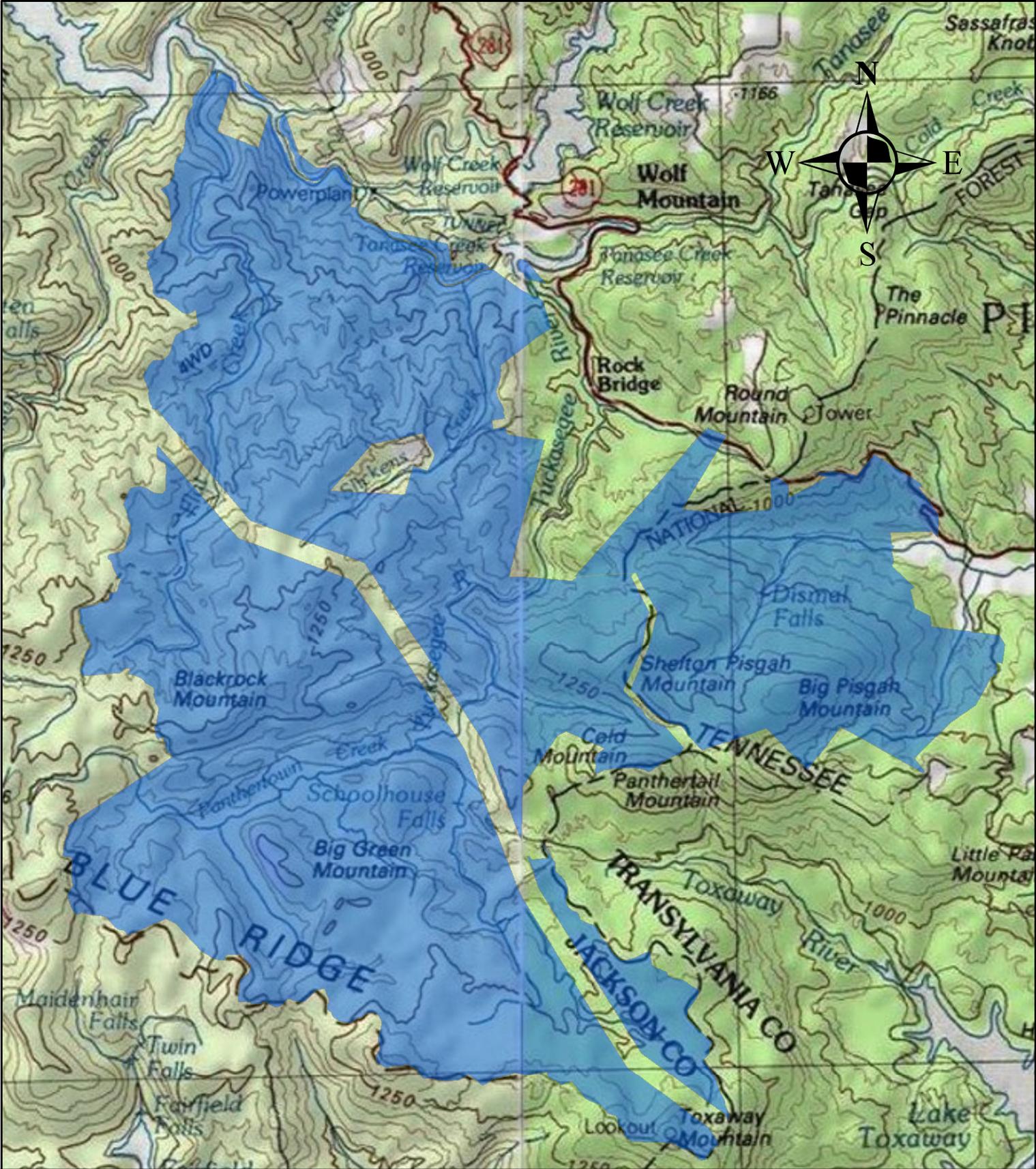
We resolve that all language in the Forest Plan be changed to indicate that the vegetation and ecosystems of Panthertown will be managed solely for the purpose of restoring and enhancing the ecological integrity and values of the area; and

We further resolve that the Forest Plan should recognize that non-motorized, backcountry recreation including hiking, camping, swimming, fishing, hunting, kayaking, mountain biking, and horseback riding is the primary use and purpose for which Panthertown will be managed; and

Now therefore let it be known that management of the Panthertown Backcountry Complex in Jackson County, as delineated in the attached map, should restrict prescribed burning and timber cutting within 50 feet of all Forest Service System Trails in Panthertown, unless such activities be deemed absolutely necessary to maintain the outstanding ecological qualities of Panthertown and/or such activities are essential for the maintenance of public safety, and

Hereby let it be resolved that Jackson County supports the U.S. Forest Service in managing the Panthertown area for its outstanding qualities and public benefits as outlined in this resolution.

Panthertown Area of Nantahala and Pisgah National Forests



National Forest Lands of the Panthertown Recreational Complex