



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Forest
Service

National Forests in North Carolina
Supervisor's Office

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File Code: 1620/1950-1

Date: June 11, 2003

Dear Commenter:

Thank you for your comments about the proposed research activities at Bent Creek Experimental Forest on the Pisgah National Forest. The Bent Creek Experimental Forest and the research unit located there (SRS-4101) are among the oldest maintained by the USDA Forest Service. Since 1925, the scientists at Bent Creek have been developing and demonstrating sound forestry practices. Their research - both early and current - is being applied over much of the Southern Appalachians. Many scientists, students, faculty and practicing natural resource professionals from around the world visit each year.

The Bent Creek Complex environmental assessment (EA) that you referred to proposed activities designed to continue ongoing research activities at Bent Creek. Some of the ongoing research covered by this EA includes a single tree selection study that was initiated in 1946. Other research projects include a group selection study that was initiated in the 1980s. Research on how best to restore the American chestnut was also included in this proposal.

The Forest Service also recognizes that there has been a tremendous increase in the amount of recreation use in the Bent Creek Experimental Forest over the last ten years. As you may know, last summer the Forest Service officially designated 47 miles of trails for mountain bike or horse use, as well as 17 miles of gated forest roads open to horse, bike and foot use in Bent Creek Experimental Forest. Expansion of recreation trailhead parking was also approved.

While it may not have been clearly articulated in the EA, most of the proposed road re-construction would have only a temporary effect on current mountain bike use. The majority of the designated trail system in Bent Creek Experimental Forest would not be permanently affected by this project.

However, having carefully reviewed all of the public comments, we have determined the EA was not sufficiently clear on this matter. In addition, we have determined that the EA did not take a sufficiently hard look at the range of alternatives that would allow us to move forward with the research mission while maintaining the current mountain biking opportunities and experiences at Bent Creek and the surrounding Pisgah National Forest.



To that end, we have decided to withdraw the EA and develop one or more new alternatives that will address maintaining the existing levels of mountain bike trail opportunities at Bent Creek as much as possible, while proceeding with the long term research which is Bent Creek Experimental Forest's primary mission.

When we have completed this additional analysis, we will issue another EA and have another 30-day public comment period prior to reaching a final decision. During this time, we hope to have discussions with representatives of local mountain bike clubs and other interested parties to help identify and explore all reasonable alternatives that might be available to us to maintain the level and quality of mountain bike experiences currently available at Bent Creek. As research continues at Bent Creek there will be some unavoidable impacts on recreation use patterns. However, we firmly believe that we can accomplish the fundamental research mission of the Bent Creek Experimental Forest and at the same time continue to provide high quality recreation opportunities. The key to making this work is an ongoing dialogue among the recreation users of the area, the research scientists at Bent Creek Experimental Forest, and staff of the National Forests in North Carolina. We invite your continued suggestions for how best to make this happen.

For more information, contact Dr. David Loftis, Bent Creek Experimental Forest Project Leader (828-667-5261 extension 115), Michael Hutchins, Bent Creek complex project interdisciplinary team leader, (828-682-6146), or Mary Noel, NFsNC Recreation and Lands Staff officer (828-257-4259.)

Sincerely,

/s/ Monica J. Schwalbach (for)
JOHN F. RAMEY
Forest Supervisor

/s/ Hermann Gucinski (for)
PETER J. ROUSSOPOULOS
Southern Research Station Director