



File Code: 1950-1

Date: April 19, 2007

Dear Interested Members of the Public:

Enclosed are preliminary working maps and a proposed action (proposal) for the Appalachian Ranger District's Shope Creek Project which is located in Buncombe County, North Carolina. The proposed project is approximately six miles northeast of Asheville, North Carolina and approximately two miles north of the Riceville community—access to the area is via US Highway 70, State Road (SR) 2002 (Riceville Road), SR 2426 (Shope Creek Road), and Forest Service Road 220. The purpose of this letter is to inform you of this proposal and to solicit comments from you concerning it. This project was developed to address management opportunities identified for wildlife and timber within a portion of the 1,596-acre Shope Creek Analysis Area (AA) Number 2, which includes Compartments 22, 23, and 24 (see Figure 1 General Vicinity Map).

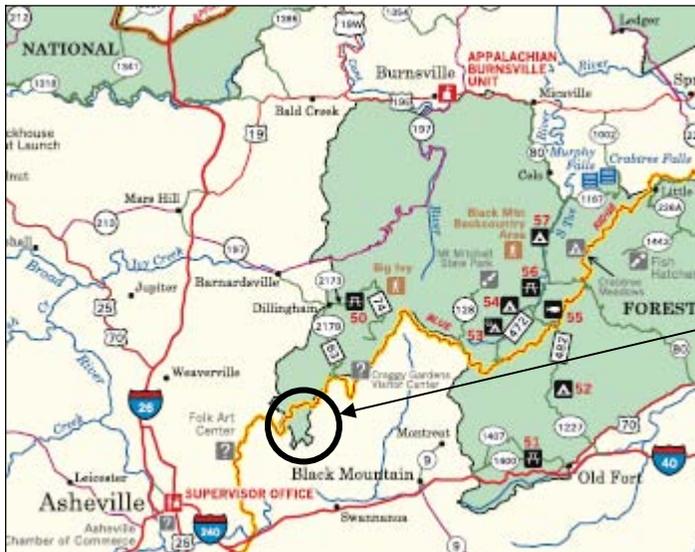


Figure 1: General Vicinity Area of Shope Creek Project

Proposal

The Appalachian Ranger District, Pisgah National Forest proposes the following actions in Management Area 4D and Compartments 23 and 24 in the Shope Creek Project AA (the Shope Creek Project AA is 1,225 acres and does not include Compartment 22; see Figure 2):

- Regenerate approximately 51 acres in Management Area (MA) 4D by the two-age harvest method (15-20 ft² basal area retained per acre) in (Compartment # - Stand #): 23-13, 23-11, 24-11, and 24-10. Two-age harvesting removes most trees, leaving some overstory trees so



that two distinct ages of trees are maintained on the same site. Overstory trees left should be long-lived since they may be expected to live 120 years or more.

- Conduct a sanitation harvest to remove the majority of white pine on about 17 acres in stands 23-12(A) and 23-12(B). Sanitation harvesting removes tree species that have been attacked or are more susceptible to attack from injurious agents (such as disease or insects) other than competition between trees. The best trees in terms of species or vigor are left to grow. No minimum basal area is set using this type of cultural treatment. Removing the majority of white pine would allow for oaks and other hardwoods to thrive.
- Control/manage known populations of invasive exotic plant species in the analysis area prior to entry. Primary control method would be herbicide (Triclopyr/Glyphosate). Application would be by backpack sprayer.
- Designate at least 50 acres of small patch old growth communities in both Compartments 23 and 24 (at least 100 acres total) to provide a network of long-term old growth communities. Designated old growth communities are not scheduled for future harvesting.
- Reconstruct approximately one mile of existing road by placing gravel and re-installing culverts. All roads, including reconstructed roads would remain closed by a gate following project implementation. A temporary bridge would be used to access stands 23-12(B) and 24-11. Both crossings would have silt fences and mulch applied to reduce potential for sedimentation to reach streams.
- Place about four miles of unauthorized roads (“woods roads”) onto the Forest’s transportation system following harvest-related activities. The roads would be disked, seeded, and available for non-motorized use following project implementation as well as future administrative access needs.
- Disk and seed unauthorized road segment D (about ¼ mile in length) following timber-related activities (see Figure 3). This segment of road would not be placed on the Forest’s transportation system and would not be available for future administrative access needs.
- Following harvest activities, disc and seed with an appropriate seed mix on all unsurfaced temporary roads, skid roads, and log landings created during harvest.
- Following harvest activities, plant an old variety of apple trees on landings and advanced oak seedlings (>2 feet in height) on harvested white pine stands.
- Site preparation and release with herbicide (Triclopyr) and hand tools (chainsaw and hand axe) methods in all stands being regenerated.
- Timber Stand Improvement (TSI) with herbicide (Triclopyr) and hand tool methods on approximately 68 acres in stands 23-3, 23-4, 23-11, 23-12, 23-13, 24-1, 24-10, and 24-11.
- Increase woody debris in Shope Creek (MA 18) by felling about 10 trees from within the 100 foot stream-side management zone within the lower reach from a quarter mile of the property boundary.
- Re-install a gate on National Forest System (NFS) lands to provide non-motorized access for recreation users. A turnaround would be developed at the gate and shoulder parking made available for about 3-5 vehicles. Forest Service personnel would work closely with state, county, and municipal law enforcement agencies to manage/control use in the area.
- Ensure the proposal meets the partial retention (management actions are not dominant features in the characteristic of the landscape) visual quality objective within two growing seasons through design features such as feathering visible edges of harvested stands, retaining trees in clumps within harvest stands, screening log landings and roads from view along the Blue Ridge Parkway, and/or modifying harvest boundaries, where needed.

Purpose and Need for the Proposal

There is a need to develop up to 10% early-successional (0-10 year age class) wildlife habitat in the project area because there is currently no 0-10 year age class wildlife habitat. The purpose of the approximate 68 acres of harvesting is to develop about six percent 0-10 year age class wildlife habitat in the project area and increase the amount of hard mast producing tree species (oaks and hickories). The Shope Creek area is the next area the Appalachian Ranger District has identified to ensure each compartment is scheduled for visit at a 10 to 15 year interval.

There is a need to control/manage populations of invasive-exotic plants because they are established in the project area. The purpose of the herbicide treatment of Japanese spirea, multi-floral rose, and other invasive/exotic plants prior to harvesting is to reduce potential for spread of them in the project area.

There is a need to designate small patch old growth communities because no old growth communities are currently designated. The purpose of designating small patch communities prior to harvesting is to ensure there is a network of old growth communities across the Forest.

There is a need to improve fish habitat in the lower reach of Shope Creek because there is a lack of large wood in the stream channel. The purpose of felling trees into the stream channel is to provide large wood that would increase the pool: riffle ratio and increase stream-bank stability.

There is a need to provide reasonable non-motorized access to the Shope Creek area and the current location of the private gate at Shope Creek does not provide adequate parking for members of the public. The purpose of installing a gate on NFS lands, developing a small turnaround, and allowing a few vehicles to park on the shoulder of the road is to provide reasonable non-motorized access to NFS lands.

Forest Plan Direction

As part of the National Forest System, the Pisgah National Forest is mandated to be managed for all of the various renewable resources, including outdoor recreation, range, timber, watershed, and wildlife and fish purposes (Multiple-Use and Sustained-Yield Act of 1960). How the various parts of a national forest are specifically managed is set forth in each Forest Plan, as required by the National Forest Management Act of 1976. The proposed actions in the Shope Creek Project are designed to implement the goals, objectives, and standards set forth in the Forest Plan for Nantahala and Pisgah National Forests.

Management opportunities were identified through a comparison of existing and desired conditions which could move this landscape toward a desired future condition. The desired future condition for a given resource was determined by examination of the Forest-wide and Management Area (MA) 4D General Direction and Standards in the Land and Resource Management Plan, Amendment 5, for the Nantahala and Pisgah National Forests (USDA March 1994 and here after referred to as Forest Plan). The general objectives for MA 4 places an emphasis on *providing high quality wildlife habitat, particularly for black bear. The preferred habitat for black bear includes freedom from the disturbance of motorized vehicles, some areas*

of older forest, a sustained supply of hard mast (such as acorns from oaks) and den trees, and small, widely dispersed openings providing the soft mast (fruits and berries) typically found in very young forest. Timber management activities should be designed to provide these conditions. The variety of wildlife likely to be present in management areas include ovenbird, black bear, and cerulean warbler (Forest Plan, page III-77). Management Area 4D objectives also are to [e]mphasize high quality habitats for wildlife requiring older forests and freedom from disturbance from motorized vehicles. Allow small widely dispersed openings throughout the management area. Close most roads to private motorized vehicles. Early successional habitat is provided in conjunction with managing suitable timber land in these areas (Forest Plan, page III-78). Forest Plan standards for providing sawtimber in MA 4 state: schedule to revisit each compartment at 10 to 15 year intervals (Forest Plan, page III-85) and to disperse early successional habitat (0-10 year age class) within compartments and analysis areas not to exceed 10% (Forest Plan, page III-31). Forest Plan direction for controlling/managing pest populations state: Use Integrated Pest Management (IPM) as the strategy in managing pest populations to achieve resource management objectives (Forest Plan, page III-52). Forest Plan standards for small patch old growth communities state: Select a contiguous area at least 5% the size of the national forest land in the compartment or at least 50 acres, which ever is greater (Forest Plan, page III-27). Forest Plan scenery standards (visual quality objective) for MA 4D calls for attaining partial retention (Forest Plan, page III-80) within two growing seasons (Forest Plan, page III-13). Embedded within MA 4D is MA 18; which [c]onsists of the aquatic ecosystem, riparian ecosystem, and closely associated plant and animal communities and is [a]ctively managed to protect and enhance, where possible, the distinctive resource values and characteristics dependent on or associated with these systems (Forest Plan, page III-179).

There are no Inventoried Roadless Areas, Wilderness Study Areas, North Carolina State proposed Natural Heritage Areas, or Forest Plan designated large or medium old growth communities located within the Shope Creek Project AA. There is Forest Plan initial inventory old growth communities in the AA and portions of stands 23-12 and 23-13 would harvest some; however 23-12 is predominantly white pine and the harvest prescription would allow for regeneration of oak/poplar. The project area is bounded by the Asheville watershed to the east, the Blue Ridge Parkway to the north, and private lands to the west and south.

Additional Information

I have scheduled an open house meeting to be held at the Riceville Community Center on Thursday April 26, 2007, from 4 p.m. to 7 p.m. Several of my staff and I will be on hand to share information on the proposal as well as answer questions and respond to concerns/comments members of the public may have.

I recognize you may have interest and concerns with this proposal and this is why I am requesting your comments to the proposal to help me identify key issues and possible alternative ways of meeting the project's purpose and need. I have decided to initiate an official 30-day Notice and Comment period with this scoping proposal pursuant to 36 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) 215.3 and CFR 215.6. Comments on the proposal shall be accepted for 30 days following the date of publication of the legal notice [36 CFR 215.6(a)(1)(i)] and individuals

must comment during a Notice and Comment period to be eligible to appeal a decision made on a project (36 CFR 215.13) as per the recent *Wilderness Society v. Rey* ruling.

Feel free to contact Paul Gilliland, Project Leader; Michael Hutchins, Team Leader; or me at 828-682-6146 if you have questions or need additional information regarding this proposal. Comments may be mailed to: Appalachian Ranger District, ATTN: District Ranger, P.O. Box 128, Burnsville, North Carolina 28714 or e-mailed to: comments-southern-north-carolina-pisgah-appalachian@fs.fed.us. I appreciate your continued interest in management of the Pisgah National Forest.

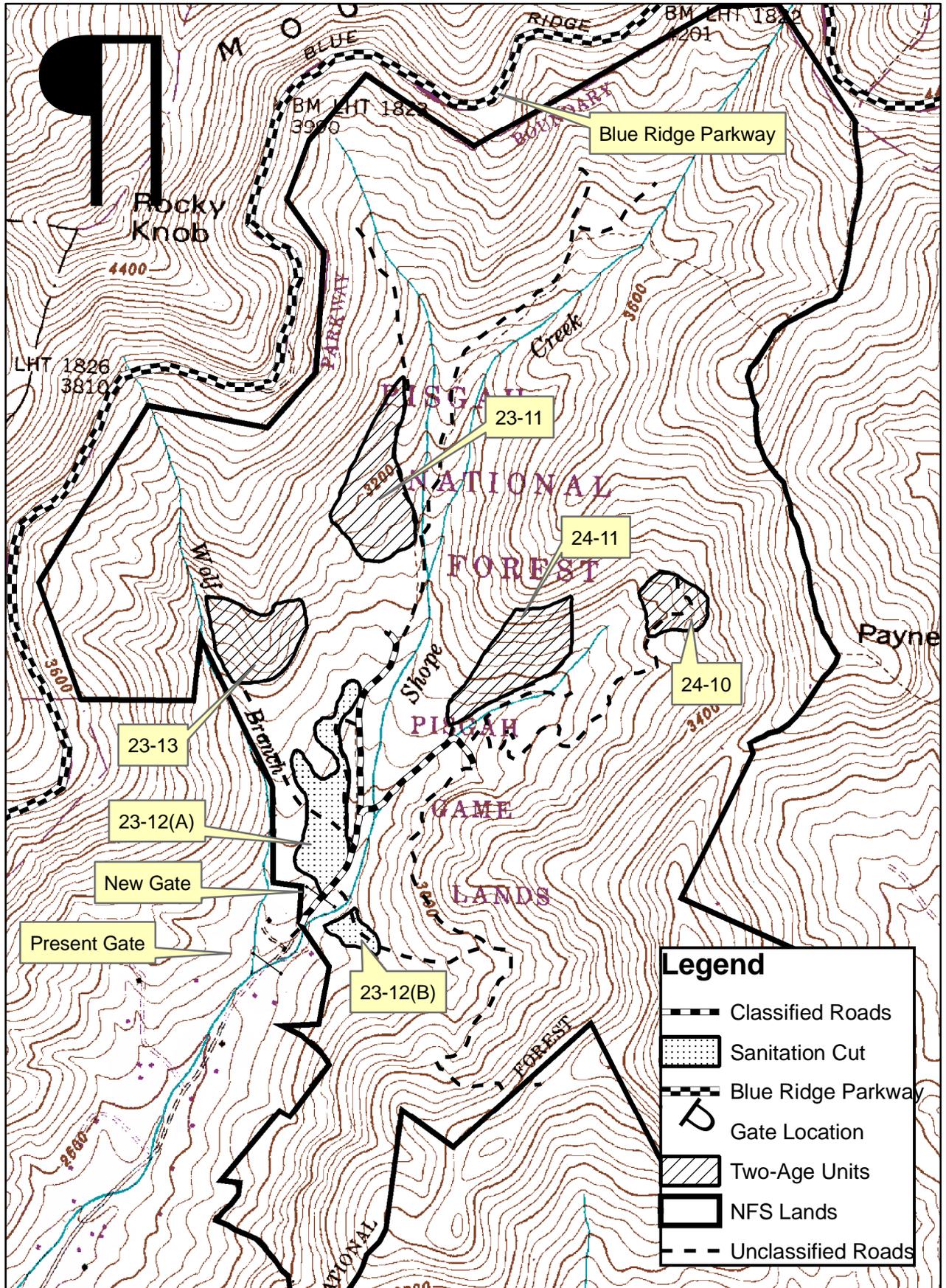
Sincerely,

/s/ M. Hutchins (for)

ANTHONY MATTHEWS
Acting District Ranger

Enclosures

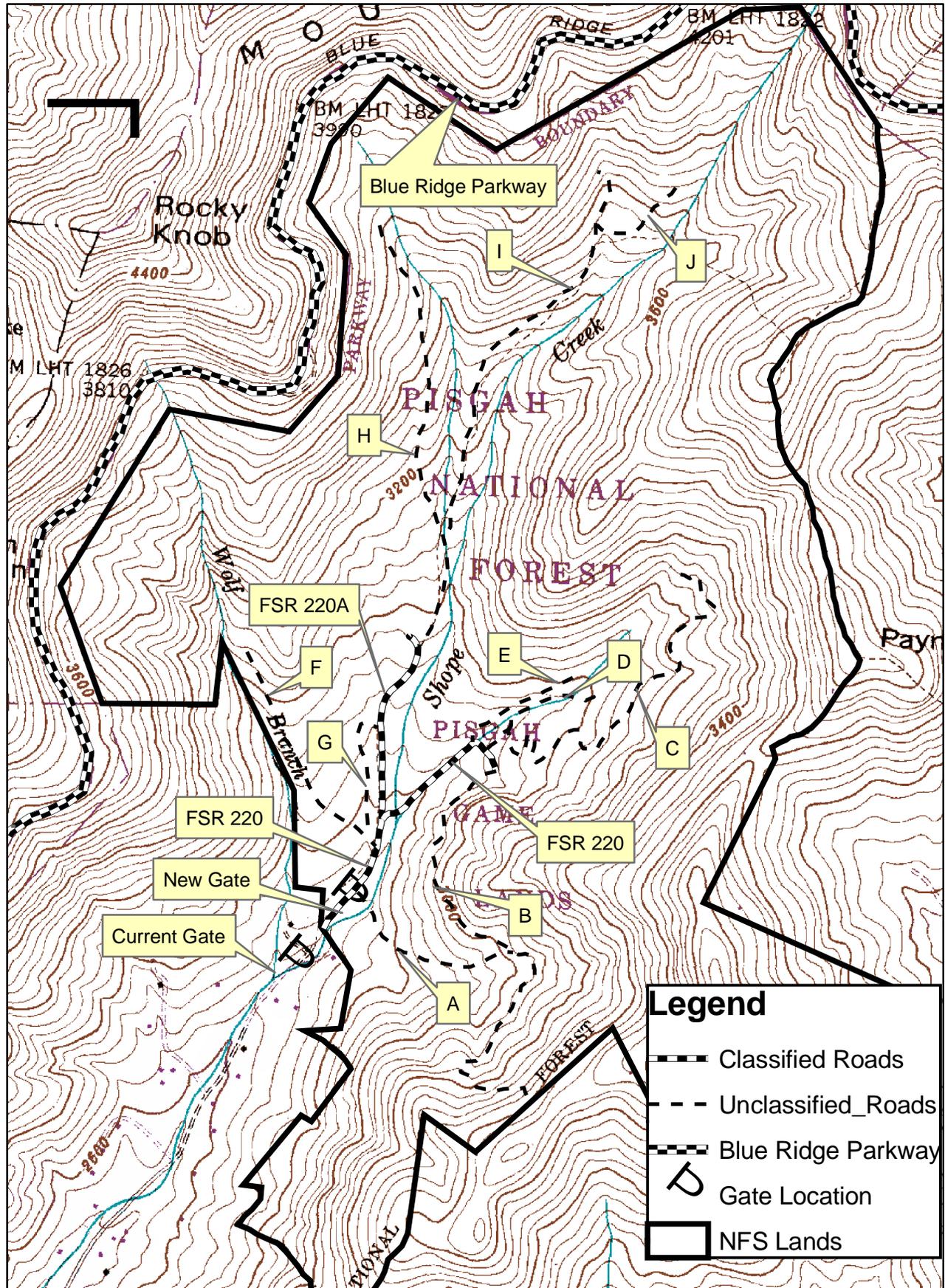
Shope Creek Project



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Figure 2

Shope Creek Roads Analysis



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Figure 3