

DECISION MEMO

Rainbow Falls Trail

USDA Forest Service
National Forests in North Carolina
Pisgah Ranger District
Transylvania County, North Carolina

I. DECISION

The Pisgah Ranger District will “construct” approximately ½-¾ mile of trail from the Gorges State Park trail to the existing USFS Rainbow Falls trail. The “construction” of the new trail will be located on an existing old “woods” road along its entire length. Very little new ground disturbance and vegetation removal will be needed to “construct” the proposed trail. Most of the new disturbance would be constructing erosion control features such as rolling dips to reduce potential for erosion and sedimentation. The existing designated Rainbow Falls Trail is a dead-end trail (out and back design); however, users have continued to access the riparian area on the old woods road. The trail is to be “constructed” and maintained pursuant to the Forest Plan (Trail Maintenance Guidelines, pages G-11 to G-20) and Forest Service Handbook, Section 2309.18.

The following mitigation will be incorporated with this decision: the non designated (user created) trail between the Nose Area and the North Face (non-designated trail 3) will be permanently closed to off-trail users. The local populations of federally threatened *Gynoderma lineare* (rock gnome lichen) will be monitored for impacts by hikers. If impacts persist, a legal closure may be warranted.

Currently there is limited access along the existing trail to the popular Horsepasture River sites. This access is limited because of the steep and densely vegetated terrain. Most of the dispersed recreation in these river sites includes picnicking, tubing, swimming, fishing, etc. Impact to vegetation in these sites is noticeable.

There is a need to “construct” this small section of trail on an existing old woods road to better connect the current designated trail that dead-ends with the trail constructed by the State of North Carolina at the Gorges State park. This decision will allow for a loop system trail on a route currently accessed by the public between National Forest Systems and State lands.

II. PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

The proposal has been listed in the April, July, October 2009 and January 2010 Schedule of Proposed Actions (SOPA). There were no comments submitted on the proposal.

III. REASONS FOR CATEGORICAL EXCLUSION OF PROJECT

This project is categorically excluded under Code of Federal Regulation 220.6(e)(1) *Construction and reconstruction of trails.*

This categorical exclusion is appropriate in this situation because this is a low impact project that will not have a significant effect on the environment. Also, there are no adverse impacts to extraordinary circumstances or conditions associated with the project. Extraordinary circumstances evaluated include:

- a. Federally listed threatened or endangered species or designated critical habitat, species proposed for Federal listing or proposed critical habitat, or Forest Service sensitive species. A biological evaluation (BE) was completed for this action on December 23, 2009, that concluded: *This proposal may affect but is not likely to adversely affect the local population of *Gymnoderma lineare* (T). Informal consultation with the Asheville office of the US Fish and Wildlife Service (Carolyn Wells, contact) was conducted. This proposal will have no effect on any other Federally listed species. This proposal will have no direct impact on any Regional Sensitive or Forest Concern species. This proposal may have negligible indirect impacts to *Radula sullivantii* (S). This impact is not expected to affect the viability of the local population. This proposal will have no effect (direct, indirect, or cumulative) on any TES or FC plant species if the above mitigation is implemented. Formal consultation with the US Fish and Wildlife Service is not required if the above mitigation is implemented.*
- b. Flood plains, wetlands, or municipal watersheds. None are present or affected.
- c. Congressionally designated areas, such as wilderness, wilderness study areas, or National Recreation Areas. None are present within the project area.
- d. Inventoried roadless areas. None are present.
- e. Research Natural Areas. None are present.
- f. American Indian religious or cultural sites; and archaeological sites, or historic properties or areas. An archaeological review was completed on May 29, 2009, that identified no objections to the proposed project.

IV. FINDINGS REQUIRED BY OTHER LAWS

1. This decision is consistent with the Forest Plan as required by the National Forest Management Act.
2. The actions of this project have met all requirements of the Endangered Species Act and all agreements with the State Natural Heritage Program, in that there are no impacts expected on Proposed, Endangered, Threatened or Sensitive species. A BE was completed for this project on December 23, 2009, to assure protection of habitat and species within the project area.
3. There is no known heritage or cultural resources in the project area that will be adversely affected by the proposal. Cultural reviews were completed by the zone archeologist that identified no objections to the proposed project.
4. There are no significant irretrievable resource commitments.

V. IMPLEMENTATION AND APPEAL

This is a non-appealable decision pursuant to 36 CFR 215.12(f). This decision is non-appealable because it is categorically excluded from an Environmental Assessment (EA) or an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). This decision may be implemented immediately upon signature and may continue until completion.

/s/ Randall Burgess

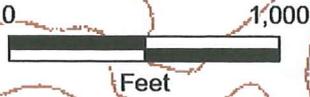
3-17-10

RANDALL BURGESS
Pisgah District Ranger

Date

Legend (2/24/05)

-  Gorges State Park Land
-  Gorges S.P. Facilities - Existing
-  Gorges S.P. Facilities - Proposed
-  Emergency Evacuation Helispot
-  Trail (many are woods roads)
-  Unpaved State Park Road
-  Other Road (private, FDR, etc.)
-  NC 281
-  Nantahala National Forest Land
-  N.F. Parking Lot - Proposed
-  N.F. Access Road - Proposed



Gorges State Park
Grassy Ridge Trailhead

Gorges State Park
emergency access road (gated)

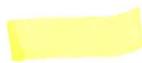
Parking Area
Proposal #3

Parking Area
Proposals 1 & 2

Horsepasture River Trailhead Project



Nantahala National Forest
Highlands Ranger District

 = EXISTING SYSTEM TRAIL
 = NEW TRAIL EXTENSION