



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Forest
Service

Nantahala Ranger
District

90 Sloan Road
Franklin, NC 28734
Phone: 828-524-6441

File Code: 1920/2350

Date: April 30, 2009

Dear Interested Members of the Public:

I have signed the Decision Memo (DM) for the Panthertown Trail Project located on the Nantahala Ranger District, Jackson County, NC. The DM discusses the decision and rationale for reaching it. Copies of the DM are enclosed. The Forest Service recognizes that this project generated public interest and would like to thank all who were involved in the project. Each comment was carefully considered prior to the decision.

The decision is not subject to appeal pursuant to 36 Code of Federal Regulations 215.12(f).

For further information about this decision, contact District Ranger Mike Wilkins or District Recreation Staff Officer Crystal Powell at 828-524-6441.

Sincerely,

Michael L. Wilkins

District Ranger

Enclosure



DECISION MEMO

PANTHERTOWN TRAIL PROJECT
JACKSON COUNTY

USDA FOREST SERVICE
NANTAHALA NATIONAL FOREST
NANTAHALA RANGER DISTRICT

INTRODUCTION

The Panthertown Trail Project was originally sent out for public comment in November of 2003 followed by a public meeting in December of 2003. Numerous comments were received and many of the trail concerns were addressed by Storm Recovery Projects completed in 2004-2006. Utilizing feedback received during these scoping efforts and recent trail condition surveys, the Nantahala Ranger District built upon the Panthertown Trail Project and proposed several changes affecting recreational use in the area commonly referred to as “Panthertown Valley”.

“Panthertown Valley” (designated as the Elseph and James McClure Clarke Forest) is a highly used recreation area located primarily in Jackson County, between Panthertown and Tuckasegee River.

PROPOSED ACTION

The proposed action includes identification of formally designated trail locations and designation of appropriate use(s); reroutes and trail obliteration proposals; improvements to current parking situations; and new recreational use regulations.

1) Trail Designations

Designated Trail Name	Old Trail Name	Trail #	Hike Only	Hike/ Bike	Hike/ Horse	Hike, Bike & Horse	Miles
Little Green	Little Green (Includes School house Falls)	485	X				.96
Panthertown Valley (from North Rd. Tr. intersection To Powerline Rd. Tr. intersection)	Sandbar & Cold Mountain	474	X				.94
Panthertown		474		X			.16

Valley (from previously referred Cold Mt. Tr. To Cold Mt. parking area)							
Panthertown Valley (from *Salt Rock Gap parking Area to North Rd. Tr. intersection and again from **Powerline Rd. Tr. Intersection to previously referred to Cold Mt. Tr.		474				X	*.90 ** 1.33
Great Wall (beyond the shelter)	Big Green (beyond the shelter)	489	X				1.23
Great Wall (to shelter)		489				X	.40
Wilderness Falls	Frolictown	490	X				.73
Greenland Creek	Carlton's Way (Cold Mt to Greenland	488	X				1.02
Deep Gap	Deep Gap	449				X	1.33
Blackridge	Blackridge	491	X				.5
Big Green	Southside	487	X				1.35
Turkey Knob	Turkey Knob	469				X	1.66
Mac's Gap	Hogback Mountain	482		X			3.13
Blackrock	Blackrock	447				X	1.70
Riding Ford	Green Creek	450				X	.95
Devils Elbow	Devils Elbow	448				X	1.42
Powerline Road	Powerline Road	451				X	5.52
Rattlesnake Knob	Rattlesnake Knob	452				X	1.56

North Road	North Road	453				X	1.29
Green Valley	Green Valley	484	X				.60
Granny Burrell Falls	Granny Burrell Falls	486	X				.31

Panthertown Valley Trail changes use designation at four points along the trail. The Panthertown Valley Trail (PVT) from Salt Rock Gap parking area to the intersection of North Road Trail (NRT) is hike, bike and horse, approximately .9 miles, and becomes hike only from NRT to the intersection of Powerline Road Trail, about .94 mile. The use was limited to hiking only in this section as the soil type was not suitable for horses or bikes. Long term, bike and horse use would result in unacceptable impacts to the trail and adjacent resources, such as, bogs and associated habitats. PVT changes back to hike, bike, and horse at Powerline Road Trail to the previously referred to Cold Mt Trail, approximately 1.33 miles. From this point to the Cold Mountain parking area, about .16 mile the trail designation reverts to hike and bike. The parking area at Cold Mountain does not accommodate parking for horse trailers; therefore, access for horseback riding from the parking area is not available. Parking for horse trailers is only permitted at Salt Rock Gap and Flat Creek parking areas.

Many of the roads shown on the maps were reserved for administrative purposes by Duke Power and they have retained the right to improve and maintain these roads. These roads will be managed by the Forest Service as trails. The roads not designated as trails will be closed and allowed to naturally re-vegetate. Any trail which is not properly maintained or exhibits excessive resource damage will be subject to reclassification of use or closed.

2) Trail Reroutes/Obliteration

Warden Falls Trail #490 was removed from the trail system since a sustainable, to standard trail could not be established through maintenance or a trail reroute. Once funding is secured Wilderness Falls Trail, formerly Frolictown, will be rerouted to meet standard trail conditions.

3) Parking Areas

The parking areas will be built as funding allows. Salt Rock Gap parking area will be redesigned to ensure parking is available entirely on National Forest Land and accommodate 10-15 vehicles. Cold Mountain will be constructed for 5-10 vehicles and a new parking area will be located off Flat Creek Road (Forest Road #4662) to accommodate 4-8 vehicles. Parking of horse trailers is only permitted at Salt Rock Gap and Flat Creek parking areas. The parking area at Cold Mountain will not accommodate horse trailer parking.

4) Restrictions

Panthertown is currently a heavily used area with considerable hiking, horseback riding, and biking use. I have decided to place restrictions on commercial horseback riding and biking use to maintain the recreational experience provided by Panthertown. In addition, this trail system is already difficult to maintain for biking and horseback riding and this will provide the protection needed to prevent resource degradation.

The following restrictions will be required through a Forest Order to protect the resources in Panthertown Valley:

- No camping within 50 feet of streams or rivers within Panthertown Valley
- No commercial equestrian or mountain bike Outfitter/Guide permits will be issued within Panthertown Valley
- Commercial and organized group campsites are limited to no more than 12 persons per site
- Parking for horse trailers or accessing horse trails from Cold Mountain parking area is prohibited. Horse trailer parking is available only at Salt Rock Gap and Flat Creek parking areas

Regulations pertaining to special uses of National Forest Land, such as outfitter/guides are addressed in 36 CFR 251.50 – 251.65.

DECISION

It is my decision to proceed with the proposed action as it will result in establishing a sustainable trail system for multiple users, reducing resource degradation, and providing recreational opportunities for a wide array of users.

The proposed action is consistent with the Nantahala National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan.

CATEGORICAL EXCLUSION

I find the proposed action is categorically excluded from documentation in an Environmental Assessment or Environmental Impact Statement in accordance with the Forest Service Handbook 1909.15, Section 31.12 (4) Repair and maintenance of roads, trails, and landline boundaries; 31.12 (5) Repair and maintenance of recreation sites and facilities; and 31.2 (1) Construction and reconstruction of trails. The trail classifications and regulation proposals are considered routine administrative actions. The resource specialists that analyzed the proposed action found no extraordinary circumstances that might cause the action to have significant effects.

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

In addition to the public notification effort that took place in 2003, on April 16, 2008 a legal notice for the proposed project was published in the Franklin Press and a scoping notice posted on the National Forests of North Carolina's website, <http://www.cs.unca.edu/nfsnc/nepa/highlands/panthertown/panthertown.htm>. The project was listed on the April 2008 Schedule of Proposed Actions.

Sixty-four comments were received.

APPEAL RIGHTS

The decision is not subject to appeal pursuant to Forest Service Regulations 36 CFR 215.12(f).

IMPLEMENTATION

Implementation of the project will begin immediately.

CONTACT

For further information about this decision, contact District Ranger Mike Wilkins or Recreation Staff Officer Crystal Powell at 828-524-6441 at Nantahala Ranger District, 90 Sloan Road, Franklin, NC 28734.

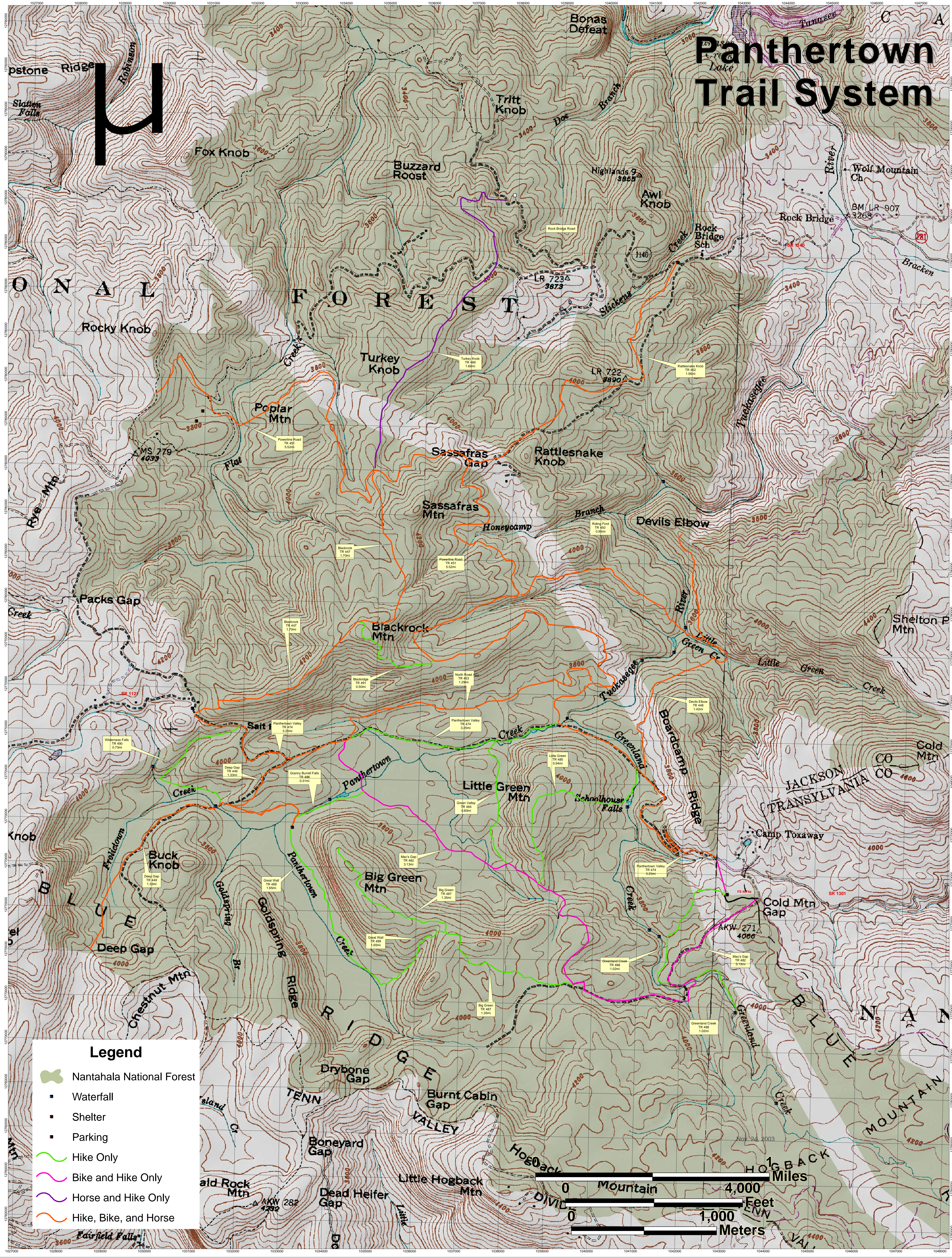
 for

MICHAEL L. WILKINS
District Ranger

4-30-2009

Date

Panthertown Trail System



Legend

-  Nantahala National Forest
-  Waterfall
-  Shelter
-  Parking
-  Hike Only
-  Bike and Hike Only
-  Horse and Hike Only
-  Hike, Bike, and Horse



Nov 24, 2003