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## NEWS • RELEASE

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### **Revised Bent Creek Proposal Released for Comment**

(Asheville) The USDA Forest Service released today a revised proposal to continue current research projects at Bent Creek Experimental Forest while reducing potential impacts to the area's mountain bike trails. The proposal directs research on a 355-acre portion of the 6,300-acre Experimental Forest located just southwest of Asheville, NC.

Bent Creek Experimental Forest is one of the oldest research forests in the country and is the site of long-term research on the ecology and management of Southern Appalachian forests. Silvicultural findings at Bent Creek have been successfully applied on both public and private forestlands across the South.

Bent Creek has experienced a recent explosion of recreation uses, especially mountain biking. Earlier this year the Forest Service issued plans for the area that some recreationists feared would adversely affect the existing trails in the area.

In response to public concerns, the Forest Service withdrew its proposal and started work on a new alternative that would allow for its research to continue while taking stronger measures to better maintain current recreational opportunities. The new proposal reduces the total miles of mountain bike trails that would be affected and restores most affected trails to existing condition after the research activities are completed.

Bent Creek Experimental Forest's research focuses on how best to manage and restore Southern Appalachian forests. It includes long-term research and demonstration areas on the full range of silvicultural alternatives available in our mountain forests.

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Included in the current research proposal is a continuation of single-tree selection and group selection research started in 1946 and 1987 respectively. Other proposed research includes work on restoring the American Chestnut, a once common Southern Appalachian tree species that was nearly wiped out by the chestnut blight in the early 1900s.

Major changes from the earlier proposal include shifting some of the research units so fewer miles of trail would be impacted. Under the new plan, about 36 miles of the 39 miles of designated trails in Bent Creek would be completely unaffected, and 2 miles would be temporarily impacted to provide access to research plots. After the research treatments are completed the Forest Service intends to restore these trails and manage them for continued mountain bike use. A little over one mile of trail would be permanently upgraded to a system road that would be closed to public vehicle use but used occasionally by the Forest Service to drive study tours to view research demonstration plots. This closed road would still be available for mountain bikes and remain part of the designated mountain bike trail system in Bent Creek.

According to Dr. David Loftis, Project Leader for Bent Creek Experimental Forest, “while the primary mission of Bent Creek is to conduct long term forest research and demonstration of results, we believe that if carefully planned and managed, the area can continue to provide outstanding recreation opportunities. We appreciate the mountain bike community’s willingness to help maintain the area’s trail system and work with us creatively to minimize conflicts between our ongoing research activities and recreational uses of the area.”

The revised Bent Creek Complex environmental assessment is now available for a 30-day public comment period. The assessment has been mailed to all who requested it and is also available on the National Forests in North Carolina Web site at <http://www.cs.unca.edu/nfsnc>. For more information contact Michael Hutchins, project Interdisciplinary Team leader at 828-682-6146, in Burnsville, NC.

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