

The Carolina Mountain Club is pleased to have this opportunity to participate in planning for the future management of the Blue Ridge Parkway. The Club has built and maintained trails and led hikes in Western North Carolina since its founding in 1923. Our members have worked closely with the parkway staff on building the Mountains to Sea Trail through the Pisgah, Asheville, and Black Mountains segments, dedicating hundreds of hours each year to MST projects. We also lead approximately 50 hikes each year on the MST and other trails in the parkway corridor.

The CMC has worked and will continue to work diligently in cooperative projects with parkway management and with other area groups to provide the best possible “opportunities for high quality scenic and recreational experiences,” consistent with natural resource preservation, along the parkway. Our long experience in this work is reflected in the following comments on specific aspects of the preliminary management alternatives.

Comment Form Question 1: Which preliminary alternative is closest to CMC’s idea of the best way to manage the BRP, and how might it be modified to more closely address our interests and concerns?

Acknowledging that the Blue Ridge Parkway already is not a “self-contained” landscape or experience either for human beings or for other living things along the parkway corridor, the CMC generally supports Alternative C’s emphasis on actively pursuing partnerships to enhance the parkway management’s ability to protect regional ecosystems, scenic views, and cultural resources such as “historic parkway” features. It is essential to ensure (1) that partner agencies and groups understand, support, and honor the historic purposes and significance of the Blue Ridge Parkway National Park and (2) that the process of coordinating with other groups expedites rather than impedes progress on urgent natural resource protection.

However, if Alternative C’s additional emphasis on a parkway management “more integrated with the larger region’s resources and economy” reflects a trend toward managing the parkway as a semi-commercial enterprise, we see that as an unacceptable conflict with the basic purpose of providing for “public enjoyment and understanding of the natural resources and cultural heritage of the ... Appalachian Mountains.” This concern leads us generally to support Alternative B under the headings Access and Circulation, Interpretation and Visitor Services, and Concessions.

Comment Form Question 2: Which parts of any preliminary alternatives should be included in future management of the parkway?

Natural Resources Management Alts B and C: Pursue Class 1 air quality classification and seek funding for monitoring and influencing air quality standards. The effects of compromised air quality on natural resources and on

people's ability to enjoy outdoor activities, including hiking, along the parkway make this an obvious and urgent management goal.

Trails Alt C: Construct new trails to better link recreation areas with off-parkway locations outside urban areas. The Mountains to Sea Trail actually runs through many of the recreation areas in Segments 5 through 7, and the expanded opportunities it offers show how beneficial links to national forest trails in other areas can be. Specific concerns about trail links in the Asheville area are discussed below in reference to the Asheville segment.

Comment Form Question 3: Which parts of any preliminary alternatives should NOT be included in future management of the parkway?

Access and Circulation and Trails, Alt C: Development of paved, multiuse trails parallel to but separate from the parkway in urban areas. As builders and maintainers of the Mountains to Sea Trail, which itself runs parallel to the parkway in the Asheville segment, the CMC strongly objects to the possibility that it might be paved or that bicycles might be allowed to use it. In our experience, trails that are hardened for bicycles are too hard to hike on. After a trail in Bent Creek in the Asheville segment was modified for bikes, our group decided not to schedule any more hikes on it for that reason. We also question whether a multiuse trail would entice many road bikers to leave the roadway.

Trails, Alt B: Develop backcountry multiuse trails that accommodate mountain bikes in areas of high demand. Please see our comments above about the difficulty of hiking on trails that have been hardened for bicycle use.

Comment Form Question 4: Which sections or places are of particular concern to us? Do preliminary alternatives address these adequately?

Segment 5: Black Mountain

Zone designation: The Special Natural Resource zone between Mileposts 349 and 377 is entirely appropriate. As maintainers of the Mountains to Sea trail through this area, CMC strongly supports limiting hiking to designated, unpaved trails and an "extremely low tolerance for impacts or intrusions."

Craggy Gardens Recreation Area, Alts B and C: Restore the grassy bald. CMC strongly supports this restoration and will be happy to work with parkway staff to accomplish it.

Craggy Gardens Recreation Area, Alt B or C: Retain and better manage the Craggy Pinnacle trail or close the Pinnacle trail and build a new trail to the Dome. CMC is willing to defer to parkway management in this decision. However, we believe that the choice should be based on the fragility of natural resources in each area and on which area can be more effectively protected from overuse. In

either case, the proposals in Alt B for using signs, physical barriers, staffing, and education to keep visitors on the trail should be followed.

Craggy Gardens Recreation Area, additional concern: In addition to the Pinnacle trail, CMC trail maintainers are concerned about overuse and serious erosion on the Mountains to Sea trail in the Craggy Gardens picnic area. We would be happy to work with parkway staff to find a solution to this problem.

Segment 6: Asheville

Alternative B: Partner with local stakeholders to improve regional trail connections and accommodate new types of uses. The CMC offers a number of hikes in Bent Creek near the North Carolina Arboretum. As the Asheville population continues to grow, we see a need for hiker-only trails from the parkway into Bent Creek to provide a safer alternative to trails heavily used by bicycles. We recommend extending the Fletcher Creek Trail (FST 350) and Middle Creek Trail (FST 352) to the parkway and to the Mountains to Sea Trail, limiting them to hikers only. These hiking trails would be much safer than the Spencer Branch Trail (FST 140) and Trace Ridge Trail (FST 354), which are heavily used by bicycles.

Alternative C: Develop paved, multiuse trails parallel to, but separate from the parkway in the Asheville area. CMC strongly opposes this alternative. Please see our reasons for this in the Access and Circulation and Trails item in Question 3, above.

Alternative B: Develop additional parking for recreational use. Trailhead parking areas throughout the Asheville segment are often full, leaving trail users no choice but to park on the berm. Additional parking space is clearly needed.

Segment 7: Pisgah

Zone designation: The Special Natural Resource designation between Graveyard Fields and the Qualla Boundary is definitely appropriate. Here, too, as builders and maintainers of the Mountains to Sea trail, CMC strongly supports limiting hiking to designated, unpaved trails and an “extremely low tolerance for impacts or intrusions.”

Mount Pisgah Recreation Area, Alt C: Restore the Buck Spring Lodge cultural landscape, including clearing vegetation. CMC strongly supports this alternative, as well as the proposed designation of the lodge area as a Special Cultural Resources zone. Our members have already worked for several years on clearing vegetation at the lodge site and will be happy to continue working with parkway management to bring the site to its fullest potential as a special cultural resource. One step in this process should be to locate and outline the foundations of the lodge buildings, which were all built by hand from local

materials by residents of the valleys below Mount Pisgah. In addition, it was at Buck Spring Lodge that the national forest system was born. In May of 1913, the Secretaries of the Interior and of Agriculture, four U.S. Representatives, and members of the Forest Commission were brought by auto from the depot in Biltmore Village to the lodge to discuss the possibility of transferring acreage for the Appalachian forest preserve, later to be known as Pisgah National Forest. Signs and interpretive exhibits--considered appropriate activities and development in Special Cultural Resources zones—should be used to explain the significance of the site.

Pisgah segment, additional concern: CMC is grateful that parkway management is working to ameliorate and control the extensive environmental degradation in the Graveyard Fields area. Efforts to relocate trails and limit hiking to designated paths are most welcome. Given the vast overuse of this area, we believe that among the minimal facilities needed for resource protection are public restrooms. In general, it might be useful to warn visitors at the Pisgah Inn and campground and at other restroom locations along the parkway of the distance between one facility and the next. The opportunity for advance planning might help to limit the environmental impact at trailheads.