

## Public Comment for April 21 Meeting

- **Steven McBride:** As a longtime resident of Buncombe County, specifically Barnardsville, I reside but a short jaunt to the magical Craggy / Big Ivy forest. My ties to this special forest are many, and my love for it travels deep.

As a professor at Mars Hill University, I often bring groups of students to explore Craggy's winding trails, and to hone their photographic skills. Students learn to capture the beautiful flow from one of the many waterfalls or cascading streams with the perfect shutter speed, or try macro photography for the first time- getting closer than they've ever been to often rare or endangered species growing along the forest floor. To a lot of these students, this forest is deeper into wilderness than they've ever been, and their eyes sparkle with excitement and wonder.

As a career professional photographer, I have been very lucky to have traveled the world, and have explored some of the earth's most beautiful locations. When I speak of the world class beauty of the Craggy Mountains, I do so with firsthand knowledge of the "competition", and I stand by my words. The Craggy/Big Ivy forest is truly a special, unique place, right here in Buncombe County. In fact, the entire westward view shed from the Craggy overlook from the Blue Ridge Parkway is the Craggy/Big Ivy forest, and is likely the most photographed spot along the entire BRP. The Parkway recorded almost 15 million visitors in 2019, and surely most stopped in awe at the Craggy overlook to soak in the beauty, and take the memories home as photographs.

As a lifelong adventurer, I regularly hike and bike the trails and gravel roads in the forest. Living a healthy, active lifestyle is a requirement for my mental clarity, and physical wellbeing. The Craggy Mountains' open space and challenging environment enables this healthy lifestyle, and provides peace and solace in this often hectic world. It is a place to escape to, a place to think clearly, and breathe freely.

I wholeheartedly support the creation of the Craggy Wilderness and National Scenic Area, which will permanently protect all 16,000 acres of this special place.

- **Doug Keen, Weaverville, NC:** Please advise on next steps for the Family Leave Act as presented to the Board by Sharon Burke at your March 17, 2020 meeting. Thank you.
- **Hannah Furgiuele, Big Ivy Community:** From my small farm at the base of the mountains, I can look up and see the Craggy's standing tall and proud and beautiful. When we first began planning for how to speak to you about our hopes for permanently protecting the 16,000 acres of the Craggy-Big Ivy section of the Pisgah National Forest in a wilderness and National Scenic Area we were living in a different time. It is incredible how quickly things can change, clarifying overnight what is truly important. In the weeks that followed the onset of the current pandemic, I spent every evening walking in the Big Ivy Forest, and continued this practice until the forest closed to the public. During this time, countless friends shared stories of their time in the forest—a place that felt safe and nourishing, when everywhere else brought only anxiety and fear.

It was incredible how despite everything happening in our human world, spring continued to unfold, wildlife continued to wake to warmer days in a frenzy of excitement, and the rains fell and fed the pristine

creeks that flow down the mountain into the Ivy River Watershed supporting thousands of people's wells and springs.

I believe there are countless reasons to protect Big-Ivy and Craggy permanently, and at the top of that list is for the clean water it provides to those of us who live in the community to its west and to the other residents of Buncombe County who are proud to call it our home and backyard. With so much uncertainty in the world, especially now, preserving the one of the largest old-growth forests in the eastern United States should be a decision we make without hesitation. We are at a critical time in the history of this forest and our community. By protecting this section permanently, we can not only guarantee clean water for future generations, we can all breathe a little easier knowing we have a place to go in times of crisis for solace and healing.

I hope and encourage you to pass the resolution supporting the full 16,000-acre Craggy National Scenic Area and expanded Wilderness. Thank you.

- **Will Harlan, Barnardsville:** The Craggy-Big Ivy section of Pisgah National Forest is one of the wildest and oldest forests in the country - and it's only 15 miles from where you are sitting tonight. I hope you will support the resolution to create the Craggy Wilderness and National Scenic Area.

There is widespread and overwhelming public support for the Craggy Wilderness and National Scenic Area. Already, 5,000 public comments supporting permanent protection for Craggy have flooded the Forest Service - by far, more than any other area of the national forest. Over 120 local businesses and organizations in Buncombe County have endorsed the Craggy Wilderness and National Scenic Area.

In the past six weeks, 4,600 more people have signed on to support the Craggy Wilderness and National Scenic Area, and a vast majority of total comments received by the Forest Service have been specifically in support of the Craggy Wilderness and National Scenic Area. National media outlets are covering the excitement and momentum building around Craggy.

Here in Barnardsville, we wholeheartedly support the Craggy Wilderness and National Scenic Area. Friends of Big Ivy, our community organization, has swelled to over 3,000 members and supporters who all want to see Craggy permanently protected. People out here - and all across the county, and all across the country - care deeply about this wild and ancient forest. And they want to see all 16,000 acres of it permanently protected as the Craggy Wilderness and National Scenic Area.

I hope you will support this resolution to create the Craggy Wilderness and National Scenic Area.

- **Sam Evans, National Forests and Parks Program Leader, Southern Environmental Law Center:** The Craggy Mountains, including Big Ivy, Shope Creek, and the Blue Ridge Parkway corridor that connects them, are beloved by families whose roots run generations deep in Buncombe County, by newcomers who are sinking roots here now, and by the tourists who support our local businesses.

Whether and how to protect the Craggies is now at issue in the Nantahala-Pisgah Forest Plan revision process. At one end of the spectrum, most of the area might be left open to logging and road construction.

This is the status quo, which has forced local citizens to mobilize in protest of such projects. One step further on the spectrum, the Forest Service might offer 15-year, short-term administrative protections.

Alternatively, as proposed here, the Forest Service could recommend this area to Congress for permanent protection, ensuring that future generations can enjoy it as we can. With different options for designation, why choose a National Scenic Area with embedded Wilderness?

First, the National Scenic Area would formally recognize the extraordinary value of the Craggies' scenic integrity. Most people experience the Craggies without ever setting foot on a trail. Around a half-million visitors per year enjoy this area's scenic grandeur from the Blue Ridge Parkway. Around 5,000 drivers each day are greeted by the Craggy viewshed as they travel to Buncombe and Madison Counties from the north. As shown by the attached map, 92% of the proposed Scenic and Wilderness areas are visible from just a few popular and close-by vantage points and the immediate foreground of roads and trails. The proposed designation would permanently protect this incomparable scenic viewshed.

Second, a National Scenic Area and embedded Wilderness Area would provide the greatest possible permanent protection while also offering the flexibility to emphasize existing recreational and traditional uses, including world-class mountain biking, rock climbing, horseback riding, dispersed camping, hunting and fishing, edible plant gathering, and hiking through old-growth forests and alongside waterfalls.

Please vote yes on the proposed resolution and ask the Forest Service to recommend the Craggies for permanent protection as a National Scenic Area with an embedded Craggy Wilderness Area.

*Map was included for reference.*

- **Tiph Worley:** Thank you for taking electronic public comment at this time.

I have a concern over the increased dependence on mask wearing as protection from spread of Covid versus the 6 foot distancing practiced earlier when masks were being deemed as not that effective. I have noticed that people wearing masks are less likely to maintain a distance of 6 feet from others because they seem to have the perception that they are now safe for society with just the wearing of a mask. This is not true and I hope the Commissioners will continue to stress the importance of physical distancing in public. Thank you.