

Terrapin Mountain

5,441 acres

The Terrapin Mountain area is located within the Nantahala Ranger District in Jackson and Macon Counties. The area is north of the Ellicott Rock Wilderness, separated by Bull Pen Road. Between Highlands and Cashiers, NC, Terrapin Mountain is one of the most prominent features of the area. Precipitous rock faces rising 500 to 800 feet encompass both the south and west sides of Terrapin. Fowler Creek has its origin in the southeast part of this area. Its headwaters gather in a U-shaped amphitheatre of rock cliffs, difficult of access, and isolated and remote in feeling. The Chattooga Wild and Scenic River flows along the western boundary of this Mountain Treasure through the rugged, remote and biologically important Chattooga Cliffs reach.

What's at stake for this area?

Despite Terrapin Mountain area's obvious wilderness characteristics (it's wild and rugged terrain and special biological values, as noted below), the Forest Service has decided that this area "does not have wilderness characteristics." This means that, unless you speak up in support of Terrapin Mountain, the area will be dropped from the process and may not receive any protective status, let alone be recommended as wilderness.

Highlights from this evaluation

- The Forest Service notes that the area has a natural appearance, but dwells on past logging. However, in our experience, the forest on around Terrapin Mountain is recovering very well and even contains old growth.
- The evaluation acknowledges that this area provides opportunities for solitude and unconfined recreation, but claims that adjacent land uses impact solitude at higher elevations. This is not true in our experience.
- The evaluation does not properly document the special biological values of the Chattooga Cliffs.
- The evaluation dwells on the irregular shape of this inventoried area, claiming that it is not conducive for management as wilderness. In fact, it could be argued that wilderness management is the most appropriate because of the lack of access. Inholdings can be excluded from the boundaries.

Evaluation of Wilderness Characteristics and Corresponding Talking Points

Use any first-hand experience that you have to talk about how you have used this area. Remember to be as specific and informative as possible.

USFS Evaluation	How to Comment	TWS Evaluation Response
Apparent Naturalness		
The Terrapin Mountain area has a natural appearance with most of the forest in second growth; the result of logging that occurred in the early 1900s. Old logging roads approach the summit of Terrapin	*The evaluation discusses evidence of past logging. According to standards set in the 1975 Eastern Wilderness Areas Act, the Forest Service must take a reasonable approach to assessing	The Terrapin Mountain area not only appears natural but feels rugged and wild. The old logging roads are very overgrown and would eventually recover to a natural state if allowed.

<p>Mountain but are not currently maintained and have become overgrown. There are recent timber cuts on the eastern side of the area off of State Route 1104 and on the far western side of the area off of SR 1603 and NFSR 1178. There are maintained linear wildlife fields at the end of NFSR 4598 and on NFSR 2052, NFSR 4564 and NFSR 1178A. There is an old logging road that approaches the base of Bear Pen Mountain.</p>	<p>the wilderness characteristics of an area. In addition, anything over 50 years of age is considered historic.</p> <p>*The area is already on the path to complete recovery from past timber cuts.</p> <p>*If you have explored this area, tell the Forest Service your experience, focusing on the natural appearance of the area. The difficult terrain in parts of this area mean that much of the area feels wild.</p>	<p>The forest on the north side of Terrapin Mountain is recovering from past logging and supports forest of mixed age classes, even on the lower slopes. There is old-growth forest on the ridge, with big specimens of trees scattered throughout the mountain (black gum, chestnut oak, white oak, fraser magnolia) and plenty of dead snags that support wildlife.</p> <p>The recent timber cuts, linear wildlife fields and old logging roads referenced in the evaluation are not obvious, and do not detract from the natural appearance of the area unless you are in their immediate vicinity.</p>
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Opportunities for Solitude or Primitive and Unconfined Recreation

<p>The Terrapin Mountain area provides opportunities for solitude and unconfined recreation, particularly in the area around Terrapin Mountain. At lower elevations, sights and sounds of civilization do not impact solitude. The topography of the area's boundaries, which include high mountaintops, hide views of civilization. The Chattooga Cliffs Trail and other hiking trails are between Bull Pen Road and Scotsman Creek on the western side of the area. At higher elevations the adjacent land uses and irregular shape of the area impact solitude.</p>	<p>*If you have explored this area, tell the Forest Service your experience, focusing on the opportunities for solitude in the area.</p> <p>*Remind the Forest Service that an area should not be disqualified due to activities occurring outside of its boundaries.</p> <p>*While there are no trails in this area, someone with local knowledge would certainly feel unconfined in this area as they recreated.</p> <p>*Tell the Forest Service that adjacent land uses do not impact solitude, even at higher elevations" (that, at least, is our staff's experience at the top of Terrapin Mountain). One can spend an entire day exploring Terrapin Mountain in outstanding solitude.</p>	<p>An area should not be disqualified from analysis due to activities that are going on outside the area of consideration. Not to mention the fact that it is common to see distant signs of civilization from viewpoints within designated wilderness areas.</p> <p>Characterized by precipitous rock faces that encompass the south and west sides of Terrapin Mountain, this area is difficult to access, isolated, and remote, offering outstanding opportunities for solitude.</p> <p>It is totally untrue that "At higher elevations the adjacent land uses and irregular shape of the area impact solitude." Vegetation screening at the higher elevations mostly blocks views. In the few places where there are good long range views, the views are of Whiteside Mountain and south</p>
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	<p>* The Chattooga River offers outstanding opportunities for fishing and other recreation.</p>	<p>toward other portions of Terrapin and into Ellicott Rock and the Chattooga drainage. A few clearings are barely evident if one looks closely.</p> <p>The cliffs of Little Terrapin mountain demand considerable technical ability from climbers.</p> <p>From the top of Terrapin's western cliffs, hikers have a direct and unimpeded view of Whiteside Mountain.</p> <p>Views of the east/southeast side of Terrapin look toward the Blue Ridge Escarpment. The area feels remarkably remote and quiet.</p>
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Other Values - Unique or Outstanding Qualities

<p>The Chattooga Cliffs provide a unique scenic attraction along the Chattooga Wild and Scenic River. There are rare plant communities present as well as high quality waters that support diverse aquatic communities.</p>	<p>*Remind the Forest Service how important it is to protect rare and threatened species of rock outcrops by safeguarding areas that experience less foot traffic so that the plants can thrive.</p> <p>*Tell the Forest Service that the headwaters of the Chattooga River must be protected.</p>	<p>The biological values of the Terrapin Mountain area are remarkable. The area is home to numerous rare plants and animals, and the cliff faces/rock outcrops experience less foot traffic than others and therefore serve as biological reserves for many rare plants. There is an area of boulder field that has high potential to support rare species.</p> <p>The top of Bear Pen Mountain is clothed in old-growth hardwood forest.</p> <p>The area supports many species of wildlife including migratory and resident birds, deer, black bear, and timber rattlesnakes on the cliff faces.</p> <p>The Chattooga Wild and Scenic River flows along the western boundary of this Mountain Treasure through the rugged, remote and biologically important</p>
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		<p>Chattooga Cliffs reach.</p> <p>This area contains the Terrapin Mountain State Natural Heritage Area. The 1991 report for this area documents numerous species that are still there.</p>
<p>Size and Manageability</p>		
<p>The Terrapin Mountain area is highly irregularly shaped, with boundaries that follow a combination of roads and Forest Service ownership. Much of the northern boundary is adjacent to non-federal ownership with several residences just north of the area. There are ten private inholdings within the outer boundary of Forest Service ownership for this area, nine of which have been excluded from the area of consideration but would still impact manageability of the area for wilderness characteristics.</p>	<p>*The rugged nature of the area and the presence of the Wild and Scenic River Corridor make the area best suited to management as a backcountry area. Even as a single mountain, this area could effectively be managed for its special values.</p> <p>*One could argue that wilderness management is the most appropriate because of the lack of access. Inholdings can be excluded from the boundaries.</p>	<p>While inholdings may make the area difficult to manage, its high quality condition and proven “ability” to restore to natural conditions limit the need for such management. The same factors that pose difficulties for wilderness management (difficult access and adjacency to non-federal ownership) are challenges for management for all other purposes as well. In fact, it could be argued that wilderness management is the most appropriate because of the lack of access. Inholdings can be excluded from the boundaries.</p>
<p>Conclusion</p>		
<p>Overall, the Terrapin Mountain area does not have wilderness characteristics. The core of the Terrapin Mountain area is generally free from recent vegetation management and has opportunities for primitive and unconfined recreation; however, adjacent land uses and the fragmented ownership in the area affect the naturalness and solitude opportunities. Recent and ongoing management on the western and eastern sides detract from naturalness in those areas as well.</p>	<p>*Terrapin Mountain DOES have wilderness characteristics. The Forest Service needs to properly document the special biological and recreational values of this area.</p> <p>*The Forest Service could stop “recent and ongoing management on the western and eastern sides” .</p>	<p>The Terrapin Mountain area certainly has wilderness characteristics. In our experience in this area, adjacent land use and private inholdings do not impact the solitude experience or detract from naturalness.</p> <p>Conclusions in the evaluation that judge areas to have no wilderness characteristics are both factually wrong and procedurally inappropriate. All wilderness inventory areas have wilderness characteristics on a spectrum. Under the planning directives it is the task of the evaluation to “evaluate the degree to which” areas possess these wilderness characteristics. When the</p>

		<p>evaluation concludes that an area or a portion of an area “does not possess wilderness characteristics” this conclusion is false because all of these areas have demonstrable wilderness characteristics to some degree (often noted in other portions of the evaluation). This conclusion also avoids the task laid out by the directives for the evaluation to “evaluate the degree to which” areas possess these wilderness characteristics. Furthermore, this conclusion is being used as a decision point about which areas to take forward in analysis. Deciding which areas have sufficient wilderness characteristics to take forward into analysis is the task of subsequent steps. This is clear from the Forest Plan directives as well as other guidance around Chapter 70. To conflate the evaluation process with the selection of areas to take forward in alternatives is a fundamental error in the process outlined in the directives.</p>
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