

Workshop Session – March 20, 2018

The Graham County Board of Commissioners met Tuesday, March 20, 2018 at 5:00 p.m. for their regular workshop session in the Graham County Community Building located at 196 Knight Street Robbinsville, NC. All board was present.

1. Chairman Eller called the meeting to order.
2. Chairman Eller asks USFS Acting Ranger Brandon Houck to speak. Ranger Houck stated that he was here to give an update on the forest service activities and to answer any questions that the Board of Commissioners may have. Ranger Houck presented the board with a current Timber Sale update; potential sale this fiscal year and recently closed timber sales. Ranger Houck stated that the USFS will be doing a crossover project to begin in four to five years and Cherokee and Clay Counties will be a part of this project. Ranger Houck stated that the Bear Creek sale will be awarded on March 20, 2018 and will terminate on December 15, 2021. Commissioner Orr asks for clarification on sales in the next four to five years and the answer was none but some active timber sales can last until 2020. Commissioner Williams stated that the forest service owns over 72% of the land in the county and going years without timber sales is not right. Ranger Houck stated that they have limited staff. The board asks if the NEPA Study's will be going on during the four to five year period or will that put the sales even further back. Ranger Houck stated that they have legal requirements that must be met by Congress and NEPA that impacts the areas. The board requests that the NEPA study be done during the years of no timber sales.
3. Mr. Houck gave a few recreation highlights and major projects planned for 2018. They will be having three youth conservation corps interns that will work on maintaining dispersed campsites on the road system and Santeetlah Lake; performing fisheries work liming streams and monitoring fish populations and performing maintenance work in all developed facilities. There will be five older American program employees to perform trash pickup, janitorial duties and two temporary laborers to perform landscaping duties which will be advertised March 19th through March 23rd.
4. Mr. Houck stated that the major projects for 2018 will be:
 - a. Southern Appalachian Wilderness Stewards (SAWS) will work for six months in Joyce Kilmer/Slickrock Wilderness to perform brushing, water bar and tread slope maintenance on fire-damaged trails within the Wilderness.
 - b. Southeast Conservation Crew will work for five weeks on the Benton MacKaye Trail performing brushing, water bar and tread slope maintenance.
 - c. Sierra Club will assist with installing a new reroute of Joyce Kilmer Memorial Trail that was closed due to fire damage in early April.
 - d. Cheoah River access point at River Mile 5.1 is planned for construction in FY2018.
 - e. Continue to work on State of NC Recreational Trail Program grants located throughout district:
 - i. Two grants totaling \$180,000.00 have been awarded to convert an additional six miles of existing hiking trails to hiking, biking and equestrian standards in the Fontana Area;
 - ii. Two grants totaling \$200,000.00 have been awarded to provide funding for the maintenance of 42 miles of hiking, biking and equestrian trails at Tsali Recreation Area; and
 - iii. The GREAT Organization has submitted a RTP Grant totaling \$50,000.00 to improve the CCC trail located across from the Cheoah RD office to repave the barrier free walking path, improve interpretation panels and install new sitting benches. If selected, the final award of grant proposal typically occurs in September and work would be proposed for the following spring after environmental review and clearances have been conducted.
5. Mr. Houck stated that the forest service has many volunteers in Graham County and they are very appreciative for the volunteers.
6. Chairman Eller asks about the restrooms at the Hooper Bald. Ranger Houck stated that the vault has a leak and it would cost around \$100,000.00 to replace these bathrooms and funds are not available at this time. Ranger Houck stated that there are restroom facilities at the Stratton Meadows.

7. Commissioner Williams stated that the lights are out at the Cheoah Point and have been for over four months and these needed to be turned back on.
8. Chairman Eller asks for further comments. No further comments was given. The board thanked Ranger Houck for his reporting.

Keith Eller, Chairman, Graham County Commissioner

Connie Orr, Vice-Chairman, Graham County Commissioner

Jacob Nelms, Member, Graham County Commissioner

Dale E. Wiggins, Member, Graham County Commissioner

Raymond Williams, Member, Graham County Commissioner

ATTEST:

Kim Crisp, Clerk to the Board