

North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources
State Historic Preservation Office

Ramona M. Bartos, Administrator

Governor Pat McCrory
Secretary Susan Kluttz

Office of Archives and History
Deputy Secretary Kevin Cherry

June 25, 2015

Lynn Hicks
National Forests in North Carolina
160 Zillicoa Street, Suite A
Asheville, NC 28801

Re: Documentation and Assessment of the Santeetlah Creek Fish Barrier, Cheoah Ranger District,
Nantahala National Forest, Graham County, ER 15-1038

Dear Mr. Hicks:

Thank you for your letter of April 16, 2015, concerning the above-referenced undertaking. We apologize for the delayed response and offer the following comments.

The US Forest Service is proposing to remove a fish barrier on Santeetlah Creek to restore the area's watershed. Based on research presented in the *Historic Structure Documentation and Assessment of the Santeetlah Creek Fish Barrier, Cheoah Ranger District, Nantahala National Forest, Graham County, North Carolina* report, we concur that the Santeetlah Creek Fish Barrier does not appear to be eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places under any Criteria for Significance and have no comment regarding the proposed undertaking.

The above comments are made pursuant to Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act and the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation's Regulations for Compliance with Section 106 codified at 36 CFR Part 800.

Thank you for your cooperation and consideration. If you have questions concerning the above comment, contact Renee Gledhill-Earley, environmental review coordinator, at 919-807-6579 or environmental.review@ncdcr.gov. In all future communication concerning this project, please cite the above referenced tracking number.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Renee Gledhill-Earley".

for Ramona M. Bartos

cc: Rodney Snedeker, rsnedeker@fs.fed.us
Andrew Triplett, atriplett@fs.fed.us

**Historic Structure Documentation and Assessment of the
Santeetlah Creek Fish Barrier
Cheoah Ranger District, Nantahala National Forest,
Graham County, North Carolina**

National Forests in North Carolina
Asheville, North Carolina



Andrew M. Triplett
April 2015

Distribution:
Supervisor's Office
Ranger District
NC SHPO
Other

MANAGEMENT SUMMARY

In compliance with Federal laws and regulations, Sections 106 and 110 of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, (NHPA) and the Programmatic Memorandum of Agreement (PMOA) with the State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO), documentation and assessment was completed for the historic Santeetlah Creek fish barrier on the Cheoah Ranger District of the Nantahala National Forest in Graham County, North Carolina. It is proposed to remove the fish barrier for the restoration of native brook trout and other aquatic species habitat.

Given that the fish barrier lacks historical, architectural, or cultural significance, it has been determined that the Santeetlah Creek fish barrier is *not eligible* for listing on the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP [36CFR60.4]). ***The proposed removal of the fish barrier will have no effect on a NRHP eligible property.*** A copy of this report will be sent to the SHPO for review and comment.

ANDREW M. TRIPLETT
Nantahala National Forest, Zone Archaeologist

INTRODUCTION

The Santeetlah Creek fish barrier is located northwest of the Town of Robbinsville, NC, along State Road 1134 (Joyce Kilmer Road), in Santeetlah Creek just before it empties into Santeetlah Lake (Figure 1). The overall objective for removal of the fish barrier is to restore the watershed to conditions that are more suitable to the native fish and aquatic salamander populations. The Santeetlah Creek fish barrier was constructed in the early 1960's to prevent native fish (known as "rough fish") from swimming upstream into Santeetlah Creek. The creek was then poisoned upstream of the barrier to remove the native fish and subsequently restocked with non-native rainbow and brown trout. Santeetlah Creek is too warm at this elevation to support the native Brook Trout. Additionally, there are several species of concern that occur within Santeetlah Creek which would benefit from the removal of the structure (e.g. Smoky Dace, hellbenders, Junaluska salamanders, etc.).

The existing structure is a reinforced concrete wall sitting atop bedrock. The bedrock has been drilled and blasted to create a shear drop. The Forest Service is proposing to use two excavators to dismantle the concrete structure and haul material off site. The bedrock would be chipped to reduce the gradient to a more natural condition. The existing access road would be used to move equipment down to the site and to remove debris to a disposal site. This old road would be obliterated once the structure is removed. All exposed soil will be seeded and mulched upon completion of the project (Figures 2 and 3).

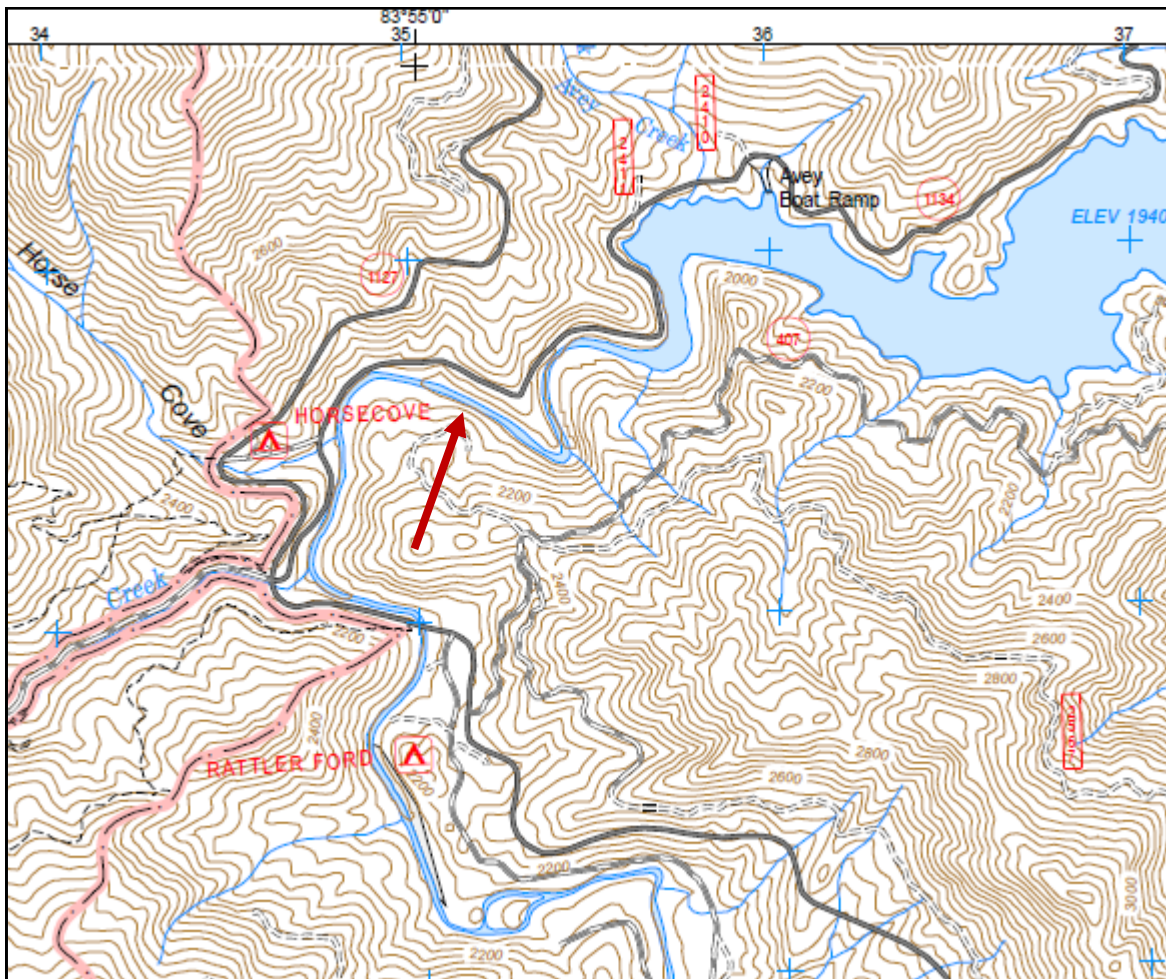


Figure 1. Santeetlah Creek quad, 1:24,000 scale. The red arrow points to the location of the Santeetlah Creek fish barrier, 31GH358**.

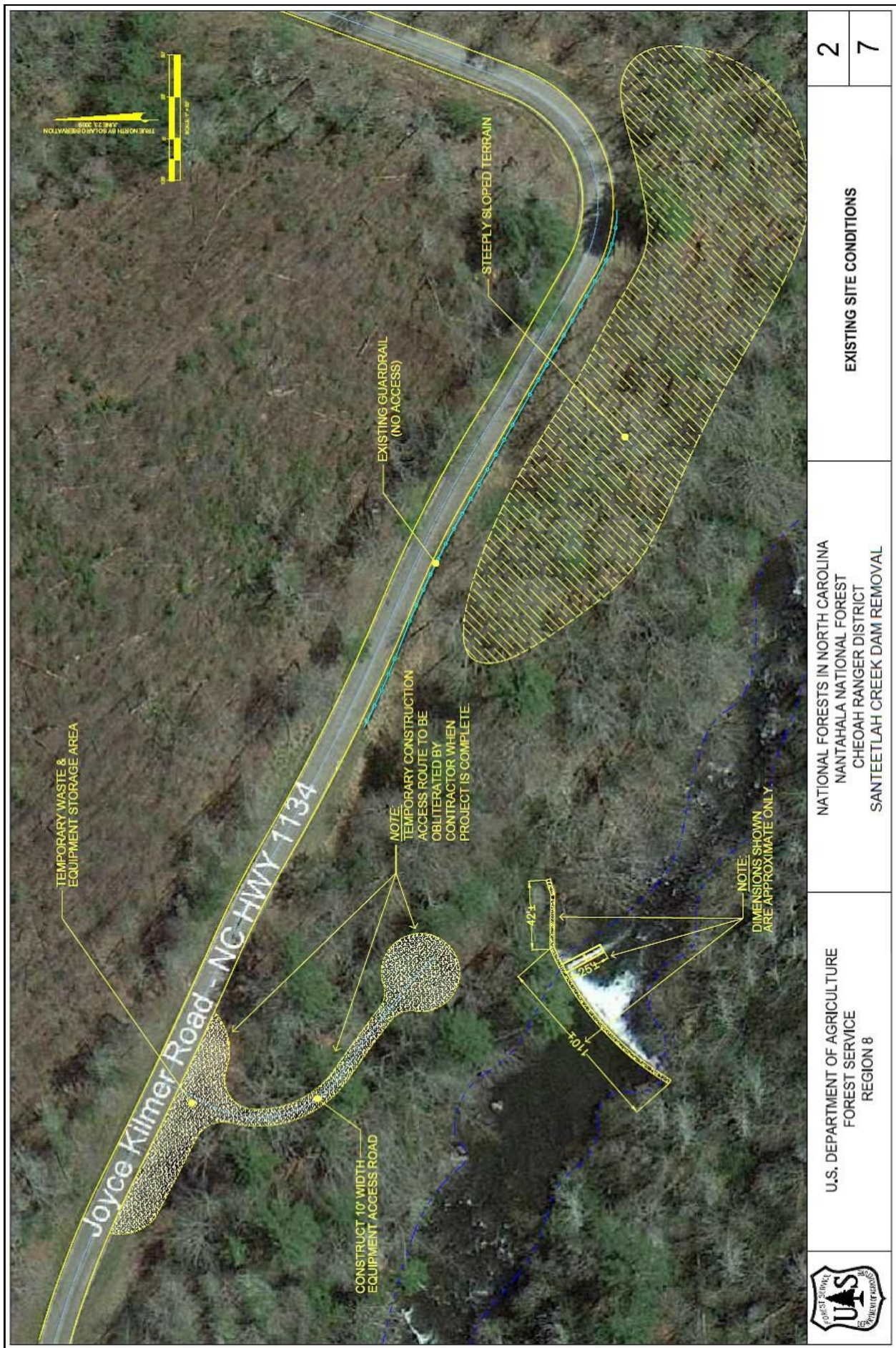


Figure 2. Existing Site Conditions

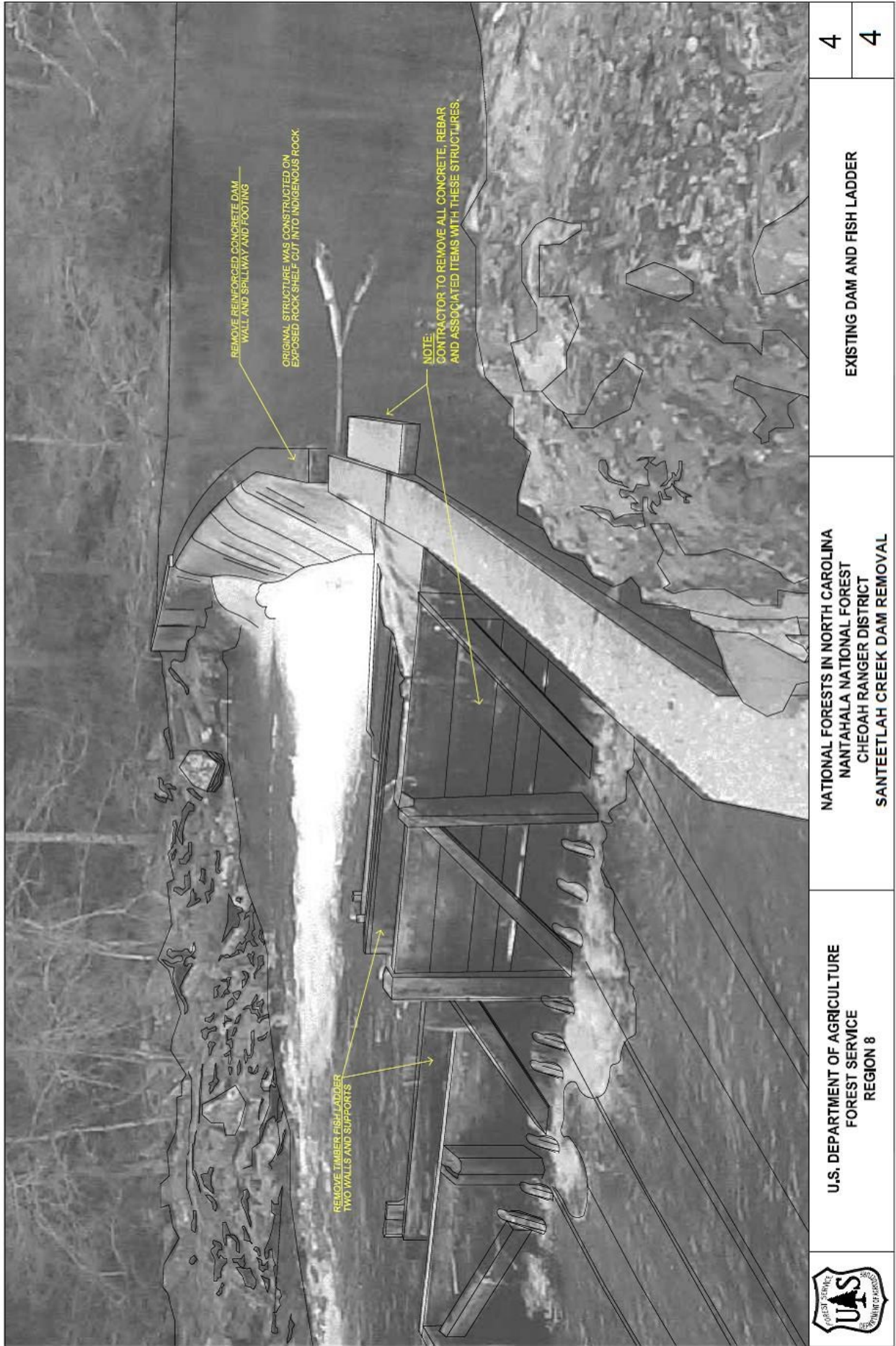


Figure 3. Existing Dam and Fish Ladder

BACKGROUND OF THE SANTEETLAH CREEK FISH BARRIER.

In February of 1997 the Santeetlah Creek fish barrier was recorded during the archaeological survey for the Avey Creek Timber Sale Project (Webb, 1997). At that time it was thought that it was of either CCC or early Forest Service construction, and, therefore, was potentially eligible for inclusion on the NRHP. Based on this recommendation the site was given a Smithsonian number of 31GH358**

As part of the NEPA process to remove the fish barrier, a thorough search for documents relating to it was conducted by the author at the Graham County Register of Deeds Office and the Cheoah Ranger District office, both of which are located in Robbinsville NC, and by the NFsNC engineering staff at the National Forests in North Carolina Supervisor's Office in Asheville, NC. No documentation for the construction of this fish barrier exists, but there are two pieces of anecdotal evidence that point to its date of construction.

The first comes from a retired US Forest Service fisheries biologist:

“The concrete dam was built around 1961 I think, just before Santeetlah Creek was renovated. Tom Thrash was Ranger and built it... The purpose was as a rough fish barrier. Don't know if it's still there, but several years later someone (Trout Unlimited, probably) started fussing about the barrier blocking trout from Santeetlah Lake from spawning runs, so we built a fish ladder hoping that the trout would use it, but would not serve for passage as well for other fish.

The SO engineers wanted to charge Tom six or seven thousand dollars just for the plans for the barrier, and then much more for construction. Tom didn't have that kind of money, so he just went ahead and built the thing for around a total of \$6500 without their help!” (Monte Seehorn, personal communication, 2015).

The second is from the current Nantahala National Forest fisheries biologist:

“I've come across some interesting documents. I don't have any construction plans but I have found an old fisheries report (1937) that gives a fish community assessment of Santeetlah Creek. There is no mention of a fish barrier and the fish community does not resemble a manipulated population (i.e. the fish community had not been poisoned at this point). The document also gives general recommendations for construction of fish barriers and a map is attached to the document showing the proposed barrier location.

I also found a fisheries report from 1967 which describes results of before and after studies for “stream renovations” in 3 streams including Santeetlah Creek from 1960 – 1962. Their project description stated that “once it was determined that renovation was needed, a fish barrier, either concrete or crib type log barrier, was built...”. This seems to agree with the other fisheries report that stated that the dam was built in 1962 (Fredric Fish, 1968). This seems to have occurred after the CCC came to an end” (Jason Farmer, personal communication, 2015).

From this information it is clear that the fish barrier was not built by the CCC, nor is it an example of early Forest Service construction; in fact, at the time it was recorded as an archaeological site during the Avery Creek Timber Sale (ER 97-8790) it was less than 40 years old.

Figure 4. A scan of a page from the original site report (ER 97-8790) showing two pictures of the fish barrier.



OVERALL VIEW OF DAM, FACING WEST



DETAIL OF STEP BOX, FACING SOUTH

CULTURAL RESOURCES SURVEY
PROPOSED AVEY CREEK TIMBER SALE TRACTS
GRAHAM COUNTY, NORTH CAROLINA

SELECTED VIEWS OF SITE 31GH358

RSWA # 96-049-002

FIGURE 6.10

SANTEETLAH CREEK-AREA NRHP PROPERTIES

A search of the North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources' (NCDRC), Historic Preservation Office's (HPO) website (<http://www.hpo.ncdcr.gov/NR-PDFs.html#G>) for NRHP listed properties in Graham County, NC turned up a total of six properties; none of which are associated with the fish barrier on Santeetlah Creek. The two closest to the fish barrier are shown below (Figure 5).

From the research conducted for this project it is determined that the Santeetlah Creek fish is a structure that holds no historical, architectural, or cultural significance for the US Forest Service or the areas around Santeetlah Creek/Santeetlah Lake in Graham County, North Carolina.

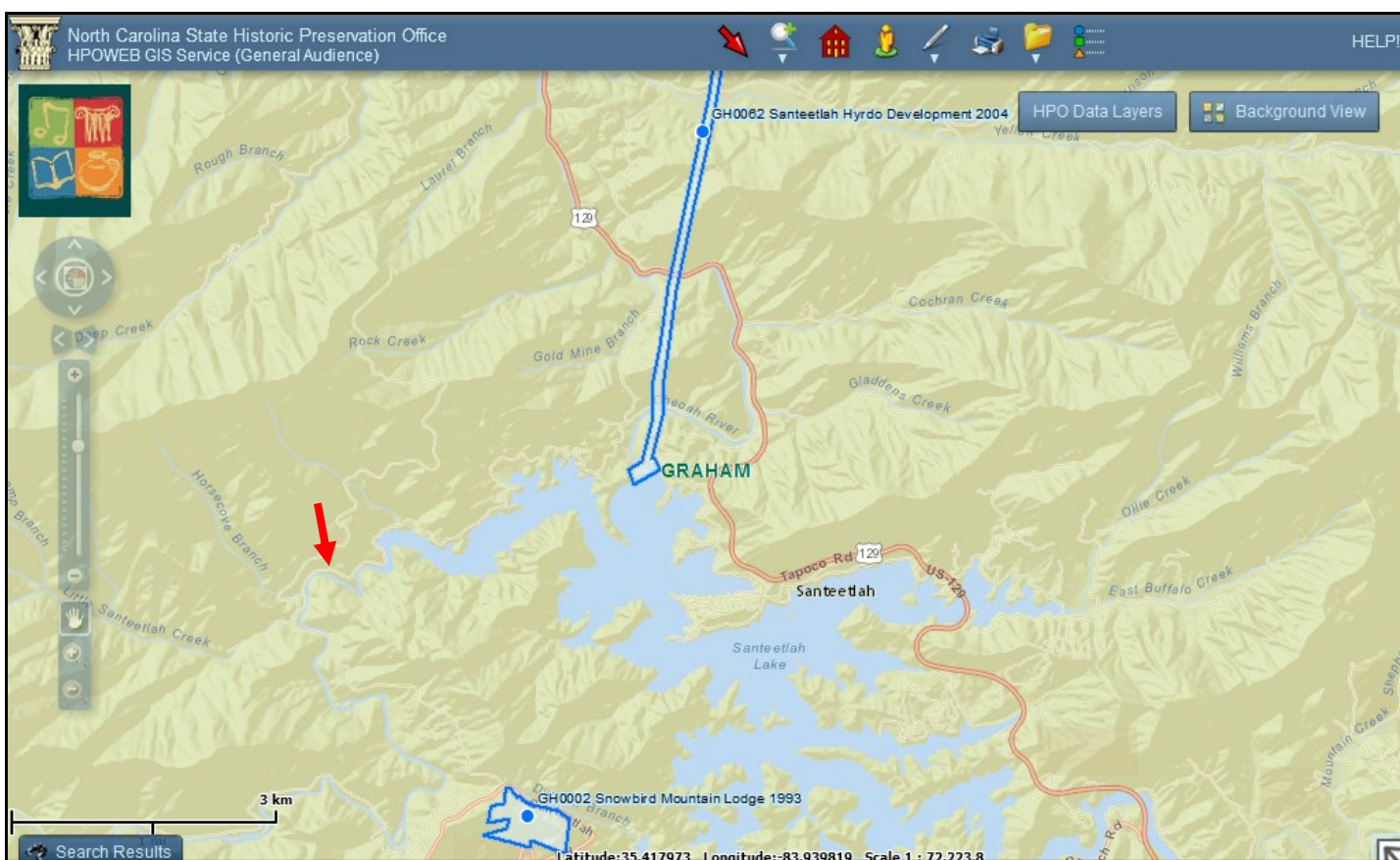


Figure 5. The map from <http://gis.ncdcr.gov/hpoweb/default.htm?center=-9262870,4172570&scale=4514> of the Santeetlah Lake/Santeetlah Creek area showing the NRHP surveyed properties in the general vicinity of the Santeetlah Creek fish barrier, the location of which is indicated by the red circle. The blue polygons represent properties that are listed on the National Register of Historic Properties.

FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS

After research and documentation of the history of the Santeetlah Creek fish barrier it has been determined that the dam is *not eligible* for listing in the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) (36CFR60.4). In general, it is a reinforced-concrete structure that is not associated with any significant event, significant person, or distinctive characteristic or method of construction; nor could it provide significant information concerning the history of the US Forest Service, or western North Carolina. The proposed demolition of the fish barrier will have no effect on a property eligible to the NRHP.

References Cited

Webb, R.S. et al.

- 1997 Cultural Resources Survey Proposed Avey Creek Timber Sale Tracts, Compartments 36, 37, and 38, Cheoah Ranger District, Nantahala National Forest, Graham County, North Carolina. MS on file USFS, Asheville, North Carolina