

## Sochan (*Rudbeckia laciniata*) Gathering for Traditional Purposes



National Park Service

North Carolina, Tennessee

### Project Description

The Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians (EBCI) has requested that Great Smoky Mountains National Park (GRSM) and EBCI enter an agreement under 36 CFR Part 2 *Final Rule on Gathering of Certain Plants or Plant Parts by Federally Recognized Indian Tribes for Traditional Purposes* (Plant Gathering Rule). The Plant Gathering Rule, published July 12, 2016, established a management framework to allow the gathering and removal of plants or plant parts for traditional purposes by enrolled members of federally recognized Indian tribes. It authorizes agreements between the National Park Service and tribes to facilitate continuation of tribal cultural practices on lands within areas of the National Park System where those practices traditionally occurred, without causing a significant adverse impact to park resources or values.

The EBCI is a federally recognized Indian tribe. The Cherokee people were the aboriginal inhabitants and keepers of a vast geographic landscape covering parts of eight southeastern states. That landscape sustained the Cherokee culture, lifestyle, and identity. The Cherokee people, and their presence and use of the area now encompassed by GRSM, predates the Park by thousands of years. The Park contains a rich abundance of consumable botanicals that continue to be an important component of Cherokee traditional diet and culture.

The Tribe and GRSM have initiated consultation for plant gathering and formed a Plant Gathering Rule Implementation Group to facilitate development of an agreement that meets requirements in the Plant Gathering Rule. Prior to entering the plant gathering agreement with EBCI, GRSM is preparing an environmental assessment (EA) to meet requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act. The proposed action addressed in the EA is to enter into a plant gathering agreement with EBCI and to authorize plant gathering through issuance of a special use permit. The purpose of the action is to allow sustainable, traditional plant gathering by EBCI members. The EA will examine alternative actions and potential environmental impacts associated with plant gathering.

The proposed agreement would establish a management framework for sustainable gathering of sochan (*Rudbeckia laciniata*), also known as green-headed coneflower or cutleaf coneflower. Specifically, early spring basal leaves, commonly known as the “turkey foot”, of the sochan plant would be collected by traditional methods (cutting or hand picking) in the spring (March-April), prior to flowering. This early spring green is an important traditional food source of the Cherokee people. Traditional ecological knowledge and recent research studies by Joe-Ann McCoy, Ph.D. indicate that traditional sochan gathering methods are sustainable. The proposed plant gathering agreement would include the following specifics to ensure that Park resources and values are not significantly impacted by the proposed gathering:

- A description of the system to be used to administer traditional gathering.
- Specification of the size and quantity of the plants or plant parts that may be gathered.
- Identification of the times and locations at which the plants or plant parts may be gathered.
- Identification of allowable traditional gathering methods (e.g., hand picking or hand tools).
- A statement that the sale or commercial use of natural products (including plants or plant parts gathered under the agreement) is prohibited in the park area under National Park Service regulations at 36 CFR 2.1(c)(3)(v).
- Protocols for monitoring traditional gathering activities and thresholds above which National Park Service and tribal management intervention would occur.
- A schedule for periodic reviews of the status of traditional gathering activities under the agreement.



*Sochan (Rudbeckia laciniata) is native to North America, where it is widespread in both the United States and Canada. Its natural habitat is wet sites in floodplains, along stream banks, and in moist forests.*

In addition to collecting sochan, the EBCI has expressed interest in collecting other plants or plant parts in GRSM in the future, pending further research and analysis. Although no specific proposals exist at this time, the Plant Gathering Rule Working Group will consider gathering of other plants in the future. The Park and EBCI anticipate that information obtained through establishment and implementation of the initial gathering agreement for sochan will inform future efforts. Specific future proposals to gather other plants or plant parts would be subject to further National Environmental Policy Act review.

## Preliminary Alternatives

The Park has identified three preliminary alternatives for consideration in the EA:

- Alternative A (No Action) – GRSM would not enter into a plant gathering agreement with EBCI. The No Action Alternative provides a basis for comparing environmental impacts of the action alternatives.
- Alternative B – Permit sochan gathering throughout the Park.
- Alternative C – Permit sochan gathering in specific locations within the Park.

## Public Scoping—Join the Conversation

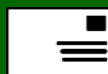
As an integral part of the National Environmental Policy Act and National Historic Preservation Act compliance processes, the National Park Service is asking for your input. Public scoping is intended to engage the interested and affected public early in the process on matters related to the proposed action, environmental issues that should be addressed, potential alternatives, and sources of data that should be considered. Scoping is focused on determining the extent and nature of issues and alternatives that should be considered during an environmental review and is completed before an EA is prepared. The information below describes how you can get involved in scoping and provide input.

### How to Comment—Public Scoping Period Open through August 17, 2018



Submit comments electronically  
(*preferred method*)

National Park Service  
Planning, Environment, and Public Comment  
Website: <http://parkplanning.nps.gov/grsm>



Submit by mail

Great Smoky Mountains National Park  
ATTN: Environmental Planning and Compliance  
107 Park Headquarters Road  
Gatlinburg, Tennessee 37738

Please enter your comments online or have them postmarked by August 17, 2018 to ensure consideration by the National Park Service.