



Wild Virginia Advocates for Wood Turtle Protection, Sound Policies on Forest Planning & Energy

Wood Turtles. Since our last newsletter, we have been busy on a number of fronts to protect the resources of the George Washington National Forest (GWNF). In June of 2007, the Forest Service proposed prescribed burns on four separate areas in the Lee Ranger District: three sites in Virginia and one in West Virginia. In September, the Forest Service decided to proceed with their plan to burn a total of 962 acres at the four sites. Long-time forest activist and former Wild Virginia Conservation Director, Steve Krichbaum, was quick to react, noting that the 135-acre site in West Virginia is home to a population of wood turtles (*Glyptemys insculpta*). Steve filed a formal appeal of the decision in November with Wild Virginia and Virginia Forest Watch joining him on

the appeal. After discussions with Steve, the Forest Service agreed to drop the West Virginia site from the project.

This decision was certainly a good one for wood turtles, although more work is needed to permanently protect



Wood Turtle, photo by Steve Krichbaum.

the population within the GWNF. Greater awareness on the part of Forest Service staff is needed so that questionable management practices will not be proposed in the future. Wild Virginia will continue its efforts to have a Special Biological Area designated for long-term protection and management of the wood turtle in the GWNF. We are indebted to Steve and many others for both initiating past efforts on behalf of the wood turtle and continuing them today. We hope you will join us in further efforts when revision of the GWNF Forest Plan resumes.

Forest Planning. Speaking of Forest Planning – Wild Virginia is among scores of conservation groups urging the **con't page 4**

Public Drinking Water Resources in the GWNF

The U.S. Forest Service Strategic Plan for Fiscal Years 2004-08 estimates that 3,400 towns and cities across the country depend upon National Forest System watersheds for their public water supplies. "Communities that draw source water from national forests and grasslands provide water to 60 million people, or one-fifth of the Nation's people." Recognizing the importance of water quality, and with demand for water almost certain to increase through time, the strategic plan lists "Improve watershed condition" as one of its six major goals.

In the next few months, Wild Virginia will be collecting information related to public drinking water resources in the George Washington National Forest (GWNF). Even though as many as fourteen municipalities may draw at least a portion of their drinking water from the GWNF, there does not appear to be a repository for the information. Compiling and describing the public drinking water information, and presenting an overall picture of the resources on the GWNF, will require lots of footwork and interviews with many community officials.

Drinking water reservoirs are an

obvious focus area. Watersheds that fall either partially or entirely within the GWNF, and from which drinking water is taken, will also be a focus. For instance, the City of Staunton procures a portion of its drinking water from the Middle River. Though the water intake point is outside of the GWNF, the headwaters of the Middle River are within the GWNF. This project will quantify how much of the watershed is on national forest land.

Describing management within the public drinking watersheds will also be part of the project. Using Geographic **con't page 2**

Wild Virginia Update

Letter from our President, Eric Gilchrist

It is leap year again and leap years usually turn out to be exciting years for me. Leap year brings not only an extra day, but Presidential elections and the Summer Olympics as well. I vaguely remember the time John Kennedy was elected when I was a young boy but I have taken a big interest in every presidential election since.

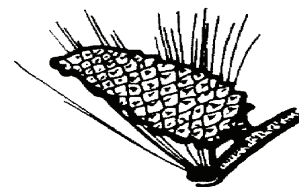
In those younger years, I reveled in the glory and pageantry of world class amateur athletes participating in the honorable Olympics. It was so pure and wonderful to watch unpaid athletes compete at high levels. Forty-eight years later, I'm still very interested and connected to what will happen in 2008. Most of us are very hopeful we'll be able to elect people who make it a priority to protect our natural world. That's our future. My urge to help make positive changes has not abated and if you feel the same, together we can do much of that through the efforts of Wild Virginia.

At our strategic board retreat last December, the board unanimously decided to keep the current slate of officers for another year. More wisdom and experience was gained in 2007 to help us guide this organization. Another board member joined us, increasing our numbers from seven to eight. We feel empowered to move forward. In addition to our already busy program schedule, we added another promising project: a study to Understand the Public Drinking Water Resources and Water Quality Issues in the GWNF. The study's results will particularly bring forward questions and discussions about public land management and how it impacts public water supplies in our local communities.

After his first year with us as Conservation Director, David Hannah has more knowledge about the issues affecting the GWNF and is overseeing the water study. He is charged up and ready to help guide

us as we leap into 2008! Heather Horn, Outings Coordinator, has an exciting year of outdoor activities planned for all of you to participate in each month. Remember: With the extra day this leap year, we can spend it on a hike in one of our favorite places. Yeah!

You, our membership, have been with us nearly every step and have generously donated increasingly more each year so that we can move forward with the Wild Virginia mission. Thank you. We could not do it without you. Please continue to support us and be involved. Contact David Hannah or any of our board members if you have a question or concern. We are looking forward to seeing you again soon at an outing or event. Happy Leap Year!



Drinking Water Project (continued from page 1)

Information Systems, we will document how much of each watershed is comprised of Roadless Areas, Wilderness, Land Suitable for Timber, and



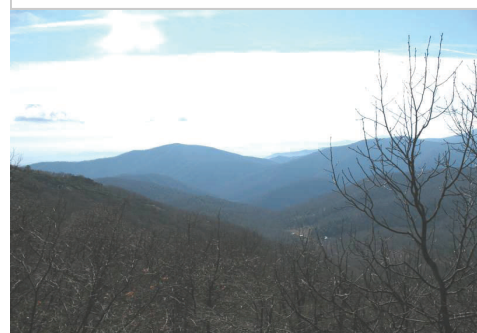
Little Stony Creek flowing into Woodstock Reservoir, which was formerly the source of drinking water for the town of Woodstock. Photo by Leslie Watson.

other designations, as well as how many roads, trails, and other features are present. We will also explore water quality issues, including the potential impacts to water quality, particularly sedimentation, from various forest management activities.

This project is timely since the process of revising the GWNF Forest Plan could resume at any time. We believe that strong protection measures for public drinking water supplies need to be a part the Plan and are eager to see what we learn in the coming months, what questions may arise, and what future steps may need to be taken. Please stay tuned!

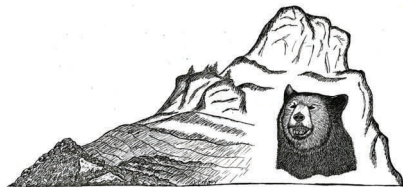


Photos above and below are from our December hike to Spy Rock in the George Washington NF. Photo below is by Will Guilford. Come join us!



Ancient Mountain Sentinel
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WILD VIRGINIA



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Donations Wild Virginia is a program of Virginia Organizing Project and VOP gladly accepts donations on our behalf. Please make checks payable to VOP/Wild Virginia and mail to PO Box 1065, Charlottesville, VA 22902. Online donations may also be made at our website.

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PLEASE BUY RECYCLED PAPER, OTHERWISE YOU ARE NOT COMPLETING THE CYCLE!

Wild Virginia Hikes and Outings

All hike info also available on our website: <http://wildvirginia.org/programsRecreation.html>

A Full Outings Calendar : COME JOIN US!

Saturday, March 1st **Trimble Mountain**

This hike offers the opportunity to cruise through a maturing oak hickory forest with occasional views of the Shenandoah Valley to the east and Big Bald Knob to the West. At four miles and almost 1000ft of elevation gain, this is a loop hike of moderate difficulty. There are no significant stream crossings. Test your knowledge of trees in winter, bring your lunch and enjoy the company of some of Wild Virginia's board members for a hike in the George Washington National Forest.

You can meet us at the trailhead at 10:30 am. From I-81 just south of Staunton, take Exit 220 to merge onto VA-262 W toward Staunton/US-11. Take the Churchville Ave. exit toward US-250. Turn left at Churchville Ave/US-250.

Stay on US-250 for 6 miles then take a sharp right at Braley Pond Rd. Turn right to stay on Braley Pond Rd. Continue on SR-715, which will turn into FS-96. At the T- intersection, turn right onto FS-95 toward Todd Lake. Go past the entrance to Todd Lake. Approx. ¼ mile on your left will be a sign for a trailer dump station. Park in this turn out area. The trail is across the road.

To carpool from Charlottesville, meet at 9am at Java Java (2214 Ivy Road, near Sneak Reviews Video). For more info call Heather at 703-732-3419 (cell).

Saturday, April 19th **Vances Cove & Paddy Run**

Join us in exploring the remote Paddy Run and Vances Cove area in the northern reaches of the

George Washington NF. Paddy Run is a beautiful trout stream that courses through Vances Cove Special Interest Area. Wildlife viewing, including spring wildflowers, early migratory birds, and anything else we can find, will be our only agenda as we follow the streamside trail. We will also visit sites near Paddy Run that were recently logged.

Some people plan to camp overnight. You are welcome to visit for the day or come prepared and stay on to Sunday. There is no campground nearby (so no running water or toilets), but numerous good camp sites. Several hiking options & destinations are within a short distance – including Great North Trail, Jonnie's Knob, Falls Ridge, and Big Schloss. Some of these could be strenuous – the weather plus everyone's time & interests will dictate what we do. The spring wild turkey season will be in (pre-dawn until noon on Saturday), so we could see some hunters. This should not impact the weekend, though folks may want to bring some blaze orange along.

Vances Cove is northwest of Strasburg. To reach it, head west on Hwy 55 from its intersection with I-81 near Strasburg (Exit 296). After approximately 13 miles, the intersection with Forest Road 93 occurs. Turn left (south) on FR 93 and proceed approximately 2.5 miles where there is an intersection with another Forest Road. This is Vances Cove.

You can meet the group at Vances Cove at 10:30am. To carpool from Charlottesville, meet at 7:30am at Java Java (2214 Ivy Road, near Sneak Reviews). You may also meet at Mr. J's Bagels on Hwy 33 in Harrisonburg (1635 E. Market St., see www.mrjsbagels.com for map) at 9:00, where the Charlottesville group will join you. For more info call David at 434-971-1553.

Legislative Update: More Work Needed to Pass Important Bills

The Virginia Ridge & Valley Act (S. 570) is still in the Senate where it was referred to the Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources a year ago. Hopefully, we will see some movement soon on this important legislation. Senators Warner and Webb jointly support this bill to designate over 55,000 acres as Wilderness or Scenic areas in the Jefferson National Forest.

We at Wild Virginia are proud that both Virginia Senators are cosponsors of the **Roadless Area Conservation Act (S. 1478)**.

Please thank Senators Warner and Webb for their strong support of Roadless Area protection.

If you live outside of Virginia, urge your Senators to cosponsor S. 1478. The bill would protect over 58 million acres of National Forest lands currently inventoried as roadless, including over 394,000 acres in Virginia. This legislation would codify what Bill Clinton put in place administratively in 1999 as the Roadless Area Conservation Rule. As Wild Virginia members know, this legislation would end the 40-year debate over the last largest

unprotected wildlands in America. **BUT, most of the Virginia House delegation has not cosponsored the companion bill HR 2516. Please especially write to Congressmen Goode, Goodlatte, Wolf, and Cantor.**

Call 202-224-3121 to reach your Representative, or look up your member of Congress at: www.congress.org. **Thank you for contacting your representative in support of full protection of our last wild places.**

Wood Turtle Protection, Planning & Energy Policies (continued from page 1)

Forest Service to return to the original forest planning rules established in 1982. In 2005, the Forest Service revised those rules, only to have the revisions ruled illegal by a federal court judge in March, 2007. The revised rules eliminate the requirement for substantive public participation in developing forest plans, release the Forest Service from the requirement to develop an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS), and eliminate mandatory consultation with the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS) on issues related to rare, threatened, and endangered species.

In her ruling, Judge Phyllis Hamilton directed the Forest Service to develop an EIS for the proposed rules changes. In October 2007, Wild Virginia and five other groups joined the Southern Environmental Law Center in their comments on the draft EIS submitted by the Forest Service. We stated the draft EIS is inadequate in several respects in meeting the intent and requirements of the National Forest Management Act. The draft EIS also fails to address the environmental impacts that the rules changes could cause.

Energy Issues. We have also addressed wind energy policy on na-

tional forests. Wild Virginia and many other organizations signed on to comments developed by The Wilderness Society on the Forest Service's Proposed Wind Energy Directives. The comments were submitted in January, 2008. Four main points were made: 1) a programmatic EIS is needed, 2) consultation with the USFWS is needed on rare species issues, 3) cumulative impacts must be addressed, and 4) areas of appropriate siting must be discussed. Areas inappropriate for wind energy development were listed and included roadless areas, wilderness areas, wilderness study areas, research natural areas, and several others. (You can read Wild Virginia's policy paper on wind energy in national forests by visiting our website, www.wildvirginia.org.)

On a separate front, Wild Virginia is opposing the coal-fired power plant proposed for construction in Wise County by Dominion Virginia Power. Though the proposed site is on private land, we feel there would be significant impacts to our national forests. The release of nitrogen oxides, sulfur oxides, carbon monoxide and mercury would impact air and water quality at a regional level. Tremendous amounts of carbon dioxide would also be released, contributing to global warming.

We also fear that increasing the demand for coal in southwestern Virginia would lead to increased mountaintop removal in the area, directly impacting water quality and other resources in our national forests.

Private Forest Land. Finally, Wild Virginia is working to have the Shenandoah Valley reinstated as part of the Forest Legacy program area. Forest Legacy is a federally funded program to protect privately owned forest lands. By funding both land acquisition and conservation easement projects, the goal is to prevent private forest lands from being converted to non-forest uses (e.g., residential development). Virginia DOF recently revised the eligibility criteria for the program and the geographic areas of the state where projects can be developed. Much of the Shenandoah Valley was eliminated from the program area. Given the extreme water quality issues in the Valley (and the fact that well-managed forests are very good for water quality) and the potential to add to the existing forest land base in the area (represented by the GWNF), removing the Shenandoah Valley from consideration does not make sense to us. We are urging the DOF to reinstate the Valley area.

A Shenandoah Mountain Grand Slam: The Birds of Winter

Article by Mark Gatewood, Pictures by George Jameson

Shenandoah Mountain runs along the western edge of the Shenandoah Valley from Bath County to Rockingham County and lies mostly within the George Washington National Forest. Because of its elevation and a concentration of cone-bearing trees, Shenandoah Mountain enjoys a reputation among birders for attracting several bird species which are characteristic of more northern areas. These birds wander erratically, occasionally moving south in the winter in response to shortages of pine and spruce seeds in northern forests.

On a bright, cold New Year's Eve afternoon, the last day of 2004, my wife, Betty, and I decided to try our luck with a winter bird walk on Shenandoah Mountain. It was the last day of bear season and the parking lot at the Confederate Breastworks on Route 250 was full of pickups with dog boxes. We paid our respects to the bear hunters and made our way north on the Shenandoah Mountain Trail to see what birds we could find.

It didn't take long. In winter, birds travel in mixed feeding flocks and in a group of chickadees we found our first target bird, a golden-crowned kinglet (*Regulus satrapa*). These are tiny grey birds with a flashing crest of gold. How they manage their metabolism to survive



Red breasted nuthatch.

cold northern winters is the subject of a wonderful book by University of Vermont biologist Bernd Heinrich titled *Winter World*.

Further along, we found two birds foraging along the trunk of a chestnut oak. First we saw the red-breasted nuthatch (*Sitta canadensis*), which is similar to the white-breasted nuthatch (*S. carolinensis*) that comes to backyard feeders but is smaller and usually prefers conifers. It seldom ventures so far south. Next appeared a brown creeper (*Certhia americana*). The creeper's mottled grey and brown coloration blends perfectly with the lichen-flecked tree trunks where it searches for insects and spiders.

We turned down Jerry's Run Trail. From behind a fallen log, we heard a fussy chatter and saw a small brown bird dart low over the ground into a clump of laurel. It was a winter wren (*Troglodytes troglodytes*), an uncommon permanent resident of the higher mountains. In the summer, you can hear its manic burbling song in ravines and along small streams. We were now at four out of our targeted five species.

Our turning-around point was the Sexton Cabin site. The tops of the tall white pines were loaded with cones and something was moving among them. Craning our necks to look straight up was tiring, so we lay on the frozen ground, heads pillowed on our daypacks, and watched – can you stand it? - red crossbills! (*Loxia curvirostra*) dismantling the cones for seed. It was incredible: five for five, a Shenandoah Mountain grand slam.

The southern Appalachians served as a refuge for northern plants and animals during the great continental glaciations. If and when this global warming thing comes to



A male red crossbill.

pass, they may get another chance to preserve regional biodiversity.

A footnote from Mark: There are reports of conifer cone crop failures in the northern forests this winter (2007-08). In November, birders were already reporting red-breasted nuthatches and pine siskins at feeders in Staunton and Augusta County. Let us know if you see any interesting birds this winter.

Among their other pursuits, Mark & Betty Gatewood are active in the Virginia Native Plant Society and Potomac Appalachian Trail Club. They live in Mt. Sidney, VA.

Want to Save Paper ?

If you would rather not receive a paper copy of our newsletter in the mail, but receive an electronic version instead (.pdf file), please email David Hannah at dhannah@wildvirginia.org.

Are You on Our Email List ?

You should be, so that you receive notice of our outings and other events, as well as occasional news pertinent to Virginia's national forests. Email David if you would like to be added.

Save the Date! Saturday, May 10, 2008

The 3rd Annual Treehugger's Ball

Wild Virginia will again be joining the Living Education Center for Ecology and the Arts to host the Treehugger's Ball. We hope you can come - All are Welcome! Music, Dancing, Food & Beverage, Raffle, Silent Auction and General "FunRaiser". Details will be coming soon. Visit our websites, www.livingeducationcenter.com and www.wildvirginia.org, or call 434-971-1647 for more information. See you there!



Would you like to help Wild Virginia in our work to protect the national forests in Virginia? **Become a VOLUNTEER!** Help us organize the Treehugger's Ball, bringing more smiling faces to folks of all ages, like the young ones at left from last year's Ball. Help us publish our quarterly newsletters. Become an Outreach Specialist and help get the word out about our work and our monthly hikes. Do you have computer skills? Put them to use in any number of ways to help us in our mission. Maybe you have special skills or interests you could put to work. Please contact David Hannah at 434-971-1553 if you would like to learn more.

WILD VIRGINIA

Protecting your favorite wild places



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