

Ancient Mountain Sentinel

Shenandoah
Ecosystems
Defense
Group

Range after range
of mountains.
Year after year
after year.
I am still in love.
-Gary Snyder

Vol V, No. 1

ACTION for the wild Shenandoah and central Blue Ridge Bioregions

Spring, 2003

STAPLES VICTORY

By Mike Kruse

You may have joined us when we protested outside of Staples office supply store to demand that they carry more recycled paper and not use paper fibers that come from our national forests. If you were there, if you were one of almost one hundred people who came to one of the three protests we had here in Charlottesville, or if you buy recycled paper, then you have reason to celebrate a personal victory.

In November, Staples announced that they would meet most of our demands. Staples agreed to achieve an average of 30%, post-consumer waste, recycled content for all paper in their stores (up from an estimated 3%). Staples has also agreed to phase out paper that comes from our national forests, old growth forests, and certain endangered southern forests.



Charlottesville activists pose for a photo during a demonstration in front of Staples on Rt. 29 North in Charlottesville, Virginia. Photo: Alex Davis

This is an enormous victory. This will send a clear message to the paper industry without creating new government regulations. Staples has created a model for other office supply stores to follow. The weight now falls on Office Depot and Office Max, the new targets of the Paper Campaign, to change their paper purchasing policies.

Thanks to the Dogwood Alliance and Forest Ethics for leading the Paper Campaign and to the thousands of people around the

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country who participated in the days of action. Thanks particularly to the people who joined us here in Charlottesville and the Students for Environmental Action at the University of Virginia. SEDG consistently had some of the largest turnouts in the nation with great, cre-

ative ideas. (The "stapler chasing around the trees" skit originated here, and was later used in places as far away as Oregon). Our success demonstrates the power of a creative, driven, and well thought-out grassroots movement.

TAKE ACTION!

Please remember that recycling is not complete unless you *BUY recycled products*. It is especially important to buy recycled paper products to bolster the market for such goods and increase industry production. For a list of resources on recycled paper please visit: www.thepapercampaign.com and click on "alternatives."

Mike Kruse is a long-time activist and supporter of SEDG

SEDG HIRES CONSERVATION DIRECTOR

In the spring of 2002, SEDG hired its first staff person. Through a generous grant from The Agua Fund, SEDG was able to hire Steve Krichbaum, a native of Staunton, to be its first Conservation Director on a part-time basis.

Steve has a degree in zoology from the University of Florida



and has worked on forest and wildlife conservation issues for over fourteen years. He is a passionate, outspoken advocate for wilderness. He is the author of the *2000 Shenandoah Mountain National Monument Proposal*, an attempt to influence Bill Clinton to bestow national recognition and special protections on public lands in the Shenandoah Mountain area.

Steve is responsible for monitoring timber sales on the George Washington National Forest with special emphasis placed

on the Shenandoah river watershed. Only 2% of the George Washington National Forests is protected as Wilderness but it is our hope that with Steve and a growing army of SEDG volunteers we can increase that number to 12% or more. Steve works mostly out of his home in Staunton as much of his work is in the field.

Killing an Oak Tree A Gratuitous Death

By Bruce Jackson, appeared in the January 25, 2003
issue of CounterPunch

My neighbor is killing his oak tree. It's taking a long time.

He's not doing it himself. It's too big a job for him to do by himself, even if he knew how to do it, which he doesn't. He's hired a tree company to do it for him. Their two-man crew has been working since a little after dawn.

It's a white oak, maybe ninety feet tall in the trunk, plumb-straight from the small branch at the top to the ground. It measures forty-three inches in diameter at eye-level, eleven feet and four inches in circumference. The two men cutting it down figure it's about two hundred years old.

All day long I've been listening to the intermittent howl of the chain saw biting into wood, then the saw falling quiet for a while as the two-man crew lowers the severed branch or limb to the yellow steel truck parked below. Then the chainsaw man in the cherrypicker attaches his rope to another limb or branch, his saw starts up again, howls again as it bites into another piece of the tree, falls silent again, and that limb or branch in its turn is lowered to the truck. All day long. First the outer branches, then the limbs, then more branches and another limb.

Today the two men amputated all the branches and limbs on the side of the tree facing my house. Tomorrow they'll start amputating all the branches and limbs on my neighbor's side. I assume that will be slower work, since the branches and limbs on my side were over our adjoining driveways, while most of the branches on limbs on his side are over his roof.

Sometime later in the week, they'll take down the trunk. Then there will be nothing except a stump in the ground, and maybe not even that.

When we have bad ice storms here—maybe once or twice a year—a few of the old trees in the park across the street go down. When they're down and broken you can see where those trees are rotted and dying on the inside. It's sad to see those big trees in the park suddenly nothing but litter, but you can always see the rot, see that they were ready to go.

My neighbor's oak isn't like that. The ends of the branches and limbs the two workers are loading into their truck are clear from center to bark all around, and the wounds on the trunk where the limbs had been attached are clear from edge to center as well. Left alone, this tree had maybe another hundred years.

My family has lived in our house for 27 years and we've had a relationship with that oak tree. It sprouts leaves later than the maples that are more common around here, and in fall it outlasts them. It shades our house all summer long. It's not a static shade, like you get from a wall; it's a floating

moving shade, changing character all the time as the light filtering through the leaves changes. The cycle of light we've grown used to here has been determined by the annual cycle of that oak tree.

And its cycle of sounds, too: light rain and heavy rain, different in spring, summer and fall. Light breezes and strong winds, different when they're going through leaves of spring, summer or fall, or across bare winter wood. The chattering and singing and calling of the birds and squirrels hanging out there, living there, finding meals there. A lively place,, my neighbor's two-hundred-year-old oak tree.

There's always been a lot of life in that ninety-foot-high trunk with all those limbs and branches and leaves. Squirrels use it as their main aboveground thoroughfare getting from the garages behind our houses to the street before their quick dash across the street into the park and back again. Sometimes, standing in my driveway, I've seen them come across from a far neighbor's house, scamper across my garage, leap to the oak tree owner's garage, leap from his garage to the oak tree, negotiate all the way across and through its huge web, leap to a maple at the curb and scamper down and out of sight for the run across the street.

The rookery of crows that inhabits the nearby cemetery a few weeks every year fills the tree twice a day as they circuit the neighborhood. Every now and then a woodpecker goes to work somewhere in it. Robins nest in it. Over the years I've spotted black-headed grosbeaks, cerulean warblers, orchard orioles, white-breasted nuthatches nesting in its branches or just loafing there for a while. Three years ago two red-tailed hawks lurked on its topmost branches for nearly a week.

"It's the straightest and tallest white oak I've ever seen," Pete Seeger said when he first saw it fifteen years ago. "It's so rare, a healthy straight white oak like that. It would make a wonderful keel for another Clearwater. Clearwater is the sloop Pete helped build to encourage people to clean up the Hudson River. "If the owner ever wants to part with it," Pete said. "tell him to call me." Pete looked at the tree some more, then said, "But it shouldn't ever happen: that's a grand tree."

And a grand tree it was, until this morning when the two-man crew arrived not long after dawn and began sawing off its branches and its limbs.

"Those limbs you've cut there look pretty healthy," I said to one of the men taking down the tree.

"They are," he said.

"What about the rest of the tree?"

"It's fine," he said. "Some dead branches at the top. The rest of it is okay."

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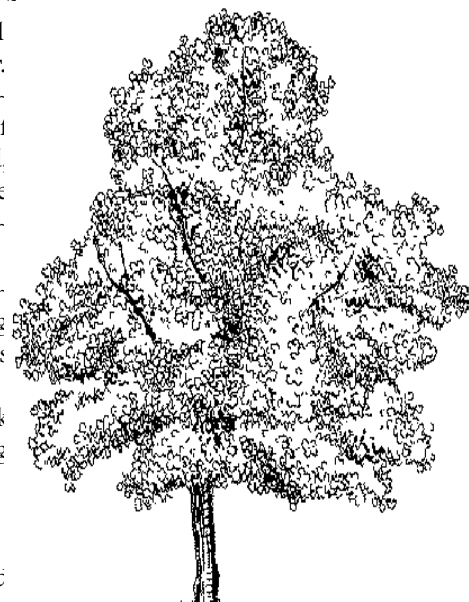
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Submissions

We will gladly print most anything you supply--articles, op-ed, poetry, cartoons, photos, drawings, etc... so please send it in. Our next issue will be coming out in Summer 2003, so please submit by June 1st. Thanks!

Donations to SEDG are gratefully accepted, and much appreciated.

Virginia Organizing Project (VOP) serves as our fiscal sponsor. Please make checks payable to VOP and mail them to SEDG at the above address. Thank you!



“So why are you cutting it down?”

“The owner wants it cut down.”

The other man in the crew said, “Makes you sick, to cut down a tree like that. But people have their reasons, I guess.”

The present owner of the house has been there three or four years. Not long after he moved in we were talking and I told him what Pete Seeger had said. I wasn’t telling him so he’d do it; I was telling him to compliment him on his tree.

“Give me his number,” he said, “and I’ll give him a call. I’ve been thinking of getting rid of that tree. If he’ll pay for cutting it down, I’ll let him have the trunk if he can figure a way to get it out of here.”

“Why?” I said. “It’s a beautiful tree. It shades your house and mine, your driveway and mine. It’s in great shape.”

“Some of those upper branches aren’t so healthy,” he said, “and it’s close to my house and I’m worried that its roots will clog up my drains.”

“So you call the Roto-Rooter guy and he clears them out. Everybody with trees does that.”

“Yeah,” he said, “but then five or ten years later the roots grow back and you have to do it all over again. And in a storm, one of those branches might fall on your roof and you’d sue me or on my roof and it would cost me a lot of money.”

“So have the branches trimmed.”

“Maybe,” he said.

He never said anything more about it and I never gave him Pete’s phone number and neither did I tell Pete about the conversation. My neighbor at the time was complaining mightily about how much Medicare and health plans were eating into his income, so I figured he would never pay the five thousand bucks he said it would cost him to cut down the oak tree. More importantly, I never believed he would do anything that awful. I was wrong.

And as I’ve been listening to the saw start up, cut, fall silent, then start up and cut again, and as I’ve seen more and more round circles of naked wood where limbs used to meet the trunk, and as it’s been more and more clear that the process is irreversible and the tree will die, I’ve been feeling more and more sick to my stomach. Just plain old sick to my stomach. Like I need to throw up.

Ours is a world in which countless infants die for lack of food and teenagers wrap their bodies with explosives and nails so they can die and kill for what they think are good political reasons. It is a world in which people drive airplanes into office buildings full of innocent people and convince themselves that God will thank them for their behavior.

It is a world in which an American president is passionate to wage a war none of us understands and almost none of our foreign allies endorses, his administration fights at home to open the last great wild regions of Alaska to oil drillers and to reduce the risk of forest fires by clearcutting national forests, and his environmental agencies set about reducing the amount of environmental crime by relaxing the rules that define environmental crime. More than a million American men and women are in prison. The catalog of horrors and the manifestations of madness are without end.

What does the gratuitous death of one ninety-foot-high plumbbob-straight two-hundred-year-old healthy oak tree matter in comparison to all that?

Honestly, I don’t know. I just know that I’m sad and outraged and sick to see it killed, to know that this small part of my world will be diminished by the gratuitous destruction of that grand oak tree. I also know that I’m not really capable of thinking in terms of millions of acres of the Alaskan Native Wildlife Refuge or any of those other areas so facilely being given up, turned over, wiped out, sold for a pittance.

But I can think of that tree, which I’ve taken comfort from and have loved for twenty-seven years. I can see that it is being killed by two men with a chainsaw. I know that it will not be here for the next inhabitant of my house, or for the next inhabitant of my neighbor’s house, or for any of the people who own these houses ever, or for the animals that have inhabited the tree and visited it season after season, year after year.

It’s all those trees, one by one, and all those lakes and rivers, one by one. One by one by one by one. Greed and bad taste and stupidity. One by one by one by one.

If my neighbor asked me what I thought about this, which he wouldn’t, I guess I would say, “Nobody should kill a perfectly good tree without a perfectly good reason.” I’d say, “Nobody should kill anything without a perfectly good reason.”

Bruce Jackson is SUNY Distinguished Professor and Samuel P. Capen Professor of American Culture at University of Buffalo. He edits Buffalo Report.



A Tree-Huggers Prayer

Peace.

Feel it in your feet, your hands.

Let them sink into the earth.

*Feel it in your bones, let them become
tap root and heartwood.*

*Grow, move, twist, enjoy the deep
eternity of soil with your whole
soul.*

*With the roots, entwine across all
distance – joining this continent
and all continents.*

*Taste the flavor of root & mineral, kiss
of worm, bliss of water.*

*Gather all of this – all that knows of
sky and sun, soil and rain – into
one being.*

*Soak up, gather, hold to you – this
peace of the trees... and let that
wonder flow, a glowing river. a
living message.*

*Send it out, with all peace and love,
with all our huge compassion on
this day of days, that overwhelms
us and tears the breast of Mother
Earth.*

*Lay it like a blanket upon the
burning cities, lay your shade and
peace, this peace of the trees.*

*And into the hearts of the men in suits
who must make our choices now
– with your sly roots, lay this
message, rich with green leaves,
and singing in the subterranean
echo of planet.*

*“As truly as you love the innocent
eyes of every newborn child and
every one who died today, do I
love the innocent eyes of EVERY
creature which roams the Earth.”*

*- Christina Wulf
9/11/01*



Protecting Your Favorite Wild Places

By Jason Halbert

It's hard for environmental issues to get in the news. Newspapers have Style, Travel, Food, even Used Car sections, but few papers find the natural world worthy of anything more than an occasional mention or column. Mother Nature, it seems, garners headlines when she is creating natural disasters or standing in the way of progress. Our culture takes the environment completely for granted.

The Wall Street Journal recently ran a story about the fairly new concept of "ecosystem services." Wall St. is just beginning to figure out how to put a price tag on all that has heretofore been taken for granted. How much is clean air worth? How much is clean water worth? It wasn't too long ago that the concept of selling a quart of bottled water for more than the cost of a gallon of gasoline would have been absurd.

Economists can now calculate the value of standing forests, especially in the headwaters of rivers that supply municipal drinking water. When New York City compared the cost of building new water treatment facilities against the cost of purchasing thousands of acres of headwaters forests that naturally supply clean water in the Catskills, the latter was far cheaper. Protecting forests to provide naturally cleansed water for reservoirs is not a new idea.

In 1911, the Weeks Act authorized the federal purchase of lands in the eastern U.S. to create national forest preserves to "protect the headwaters of navigable streams." The cutover, burned and eroded slopes of what became the Shenandoah National Forest in 1918 (later renamed the George Washington) are the headwaters of many important navigable streams. More importantly, these forests, now beginning to recover, provide dozens of communities with clean drinking water, wonderful recreational opportunities, and millions in tourism dollars. Three of Charlottesville's reservoirs are partially surrounded by publicly owned forested areas; the Sugar Hollow reservoir water originates in Shenandoah National Park.

All of the watersheds in Virginia that contain roadless areas are sources of drinking water to varying degrees.

The last century has seen an explosion in the construction of roads—paved, unpaved, mapped and unmapped. There are more than 410,000 miles of roads on national forest lands alone. The US Forest Service has built more road miles than any other entity in the world history. The few areas left on pub-

lic land unspoiled by roads, "roadless areas," are rare gems in a landscape crisscrossed by roads. Their value as roadless areas has been calculated and it far outstrips the value of the timber or mineral resources that might be extracted.

Only 5% of Virginia's National Forests are federally protected as Wilderness areas. About 8% of all public lands in Vir-

The value of standing, roadless blocks of forestland, especially in the headwaters of major streams and rivers is enormous. Who can place a monetary value on the feeling of awe when one sees a bear in the wild?

ginia are protected as Wilderness. Shenandoah National Park contains the largest designated Wilderness areas in Virginia and adds the extra 3% to our total. The table below lists the existing inventoried roadless areas in the George Washington National Forest (this excludes the Jefferson National Forest and Shenandoah National Park).

The average volume of timber offered for sale from 1996-98 from all roadless

areas in Virginia was 4% of the total volume. In the Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) on the Roadless Area Conservation Rule (the Rule), no communities were listed as "potentially affected communities" for Virginia. These two points are critical.

SEDG is in the process of an interesting mapping analysis for the areas listed above that fall within the Shenandoah Watershed. Thanks to a grant from the Agua Fund of the Tides Foundation, we were able to hire Steve Krichbaum, a Staunton native, to actively defend these important wild places from further encroachment from roads and destructive timber sales. Our analysis will highlight the importance of roadless areas to municipal drinking water supplies (something that Governor Mark Warner is stressing after last year's drought), and downstream water quality (something important to everyone who likes to fish, canoe or swim). For interesting map images for the Shenandoah Watershed, we encourage you to visit the Canaan Valley Institute's mapping server at:

<http://canaanvi.org/gis/mapFrame2.asp>

SEDG submitted official comments throughout the more than two-year process that led to the final Rule. So did 46,301 other Virginians. 98.5% of those Virginians agreed with SEDG—that roadless areas need full

Inventoried Roadless Area	Acres	Ranger District
Adams Peak	7,076	Pedlar
Beards Mt.	7,457	Warm Springs
Big Schloss	20,755	Lee
Crawford Mt.	9,868	Deerfield
Dolly Anne	7,804	James River
Dry River	7,313	Dry River
Elliott Knob	9,376	Deerfield
Gum Run	12,585	Dry River
Jerkentight	16,668	Deerfield
Kelley Mt.	7,632	Pedlar
Laurel Fork	9,938	Warm Springs
Little Alleghany Mt.	10,109	Warm Springs
Little River	27,248	Dry River
Mill Mt	10,826	Warm Springs/J.R.
Mount Pleasant	8,905	Pedlar
Northern Massanutten	9,410	Lee
Oak Knob	10,866	Dry River
Oliver Mt	13,081	James River
Ramsey's Draft Addition	12,771	Dry River/Deerfield
Rough Mt. Addition	1,131	Warm Springs
St. Mary's Addition	1,441	Pedlar
Skidmore	5,635	Dry River
Southern Massanutten	11,919	Lee
The Friars	2,020	Pedlar
Three Sisters	8,150	Pedlar
TOTAL (25)	249,984	

protection. That is a fairly clear statement of support from Virginia. Still, Congressmen Goodlatte and Goode both oppose this rule and Congressmen Boucher and Wolf support it.

The Bush administration has said repeatedly in the press and in court that this rule did not allow for sufficient public comment. That is outrageous. This rule garnered the most official comments of any US Government action in our nation's history. Over 1.75 million comments were sent to the Forest Service. Every state except Idaho showed a majority supported the protection of roadless areas from new roads, logging, and mining. Idaho joined with timber giant Boise Cascade to sue to stop the Rule. In December the 9th Circuit US Court of Appeals ruled in favor of the forests and said the Rule process was indeed more than adequate and to argue otherwise was absurd. The court sent the decision back to Idaho for review by the original Judge who ruled against it. So, for now, the Rule is law and it protects 58.1 million acres of your National Forests. The Ninth Circuit stated in their ruling,

“[R]oadless areas contribute to the health of the public because they help preserve the forest system's watersheds, the rivers, streams, lakes, and wetlands that are ‘the circulatory system of ecosystems, and water is the vital fluid for inhabitants of these ecosystems, including people.’”

If the Bush Administration has their way, it will be scrapped. Assistant Secretary of Agriculture Mark Rey, a former timber industry lobbyist, is now in charge of the US Forest Service. He is busy drafting new regulations to gut the Rule or simply end public and environmental review of destructive projects on federal land. For more information on the court case, please see here: <http://www.earthjustice.org/urgent/display.html?ID=97>

The value of standing, roadless blocks of forestland, especially in the headwaters of major streams and rivers is enormous. Who can place a monetary value on the feeling of awe when one sees a bear in the wild? When a child laughs after skipping a stone on a clear pool or chasing a butterfly in the forest, what is the value? Roadless areas represent the last unspoiled wild areas of Virginia, they are important for their own sake and for future generations. The debate is over, Americans want roadless areas protected.

Progress Made on High Knob National Recreation Area

By Jen Creasy

On August 24, 2002, the Clinch Coalition, representing 5,000 citizens in southwestern Virginia, unveiled an ambitious proposal for a High Knob National Conservation and Recreation Area in Lee, Scott, and Wise counties, Virginia.

On Friday, February 7, 2003, the proposal took a large step forward when U.S. Rep. Rick Boucher convened a special advisory committee to look at the possibility of forming a High Knob National Recreation Area. The committee is comprised of 18 members from local governments, tourism agencies, environmental groups and the timber industry.

Congressman Boucher modeled the committee after the Stoney Creek Advisory Committee, assembled in the wake of the devastating flooding on Stoney Creek in Scott County in July of 2001. This committee recommended that the U.S. Forest Service and other interested parties pursue the feasibility of the recreation area proposal. The new committee will do just that as well as recommend boundaries for the recreation area, and determine what, if any, recreational facilities it should include.

As the Clinch Coalition envisions it, the proposed area would be bounded by the Clinch River and the Guest River on the south and east, and by US routes 23 and 58A on the west and north. Public lands within this area would be managed for watershed protection and ecological diversity. New recreational opportunities and facilities would be developed. Hunting and fishing would be encouraged. There would be no commercial timbering on public lands.

There would be a special restoration effort for the Stoney Creek watershed, badly damaged by mudslides and flooding in July 2001 and March 2002. There would be no new restrictions on the use of private lands. Indeed, the proposal would: stimulate and coordinate government developmental assistance for compatible projects. Along the US 23 & 58A corridor there would be incentives for the development of tourism facilities and services such as motels, restaurants, outfitters, and entertainment.

In the Clinch River valley, Hunters' Valley, and the Guest River Gorge, developments would include an Area Headquarters and Museum, along with environmental research and educational facilities. Private landowners and businesses would be assisted to develop base camps for canoeing, horse-

back and wagon trains, hiking and biking, cabins and cottages for visitors.

Congressman Boucher has called the concept of a National Recreation Area, “The best idea I have heard this year.” He also stated that he feels establishment of the recreation area would complement the area's culture and scenic value. And, the scenic and cultural value of this area is unquestionable. The Nature Conservancy has identified the Clinch River and its High Knob headwaters as the most precious and vulnerable ecosystem in the eastern United States. It is also home to thousands of people who need more secure economic opportunities. Congressman Boucher states that he is in favor of establishing the area as a way to increase tourism, which in turn will create new jobs.

Opposition to the national recreation area designation has been steep, especially in Scott County. Many locals fear that if Congress passed legislation for a national recreation area designation, it would mean losing private land holdings and mineral rights, by condemnation, inside or surrounding national forest land in High Knob. The Scott County Board of Supervisors voiced the concerns of their citizens on March 5, 2003, when they dopted a resolution opposing the designation of a federal national recreational area in their county. Shortly thereafter, Senator Allen announced that he shares the county's opposition to designation.

These latest announcements have not deterred the advisory committee, however, from their mission. After many meetings, the committee reached some consensus on key points at their last gathering, a field trip to High Knob. It is apparent, however, that there is still much friction, frustration and mistrust between members of the committee. Some members want to make sure environmental protection does not come at the expense of logging, hunting and all types of recreation on public lands. Other members are not sure about the details of the proposal, but know designation as a national recreation area would literally put High Knob on the map, thus increasing tourism prospects. While still others feel that the designation will have an adverse affect on their county's economy. Boucher continues to lament that the committee has not seen enough of or the right economic data to determine whether a national recreation area makes sense for High Knob. Therefore, Committee members will be reviewing additional economic data at the next meeting.

In the meantime, you can find maps and more information at:

www.ClinchCoalition.org.

Bush and Forest Policy

By Christina Wulf

There seems to be a common theme to the Bush administration – disabling public oversight of the government’s environmental activities. That theme has an exception, however, if the “public” in question is a wealthy corporation, like the lead players in the timber industry.

The Bush administration’s plans for America’s National Forests make a fine example of this situation. The timber industry has plenty of oversight and input into U.S. forest policy, because the man in charge of the U.S. Forest Service, Undersecretary of Agriculture Mark Rey, was the chief lobbyist in Congress for the timber industry’s American Forest and Paper Association for 18 years. Later, as a staffer for Idaho Republican Senator Larry Craig, Rey wrote the 1995 Salvage Logging Rider which allowed a year and a half of rampant logging on National Forests without environmental review.

Bush and Rey are taking every opportunity to permanently reproduce those conditions by changing existing laws protecting National Forests — particularly the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), the Endangered Species Act (ESA), and the National Forest Management Act (NFMA) – all keystone environmental laws, critical for forest habitat protection.

Since the American public would not stand for the total repeal of these laws, the Bush administration is targeting the implementing regulations of the laws to make piecemeal changes. Indeed, we need stronger laws to save our forests from over-cutting, acid rain, development, invasive pests, and other immediate threats. Instead, the timber industry use the government to dictate that the public be deprived of a healthy environment, without access to legal redress.

Proposed changes to NFMA regulations further limit opportunities for scientific review and public involvement in designing Forest Plans for each National Forest. Bush/Rey also want to remove requirements that the Forest Service protect the viability of wildlife species and take away the right of citizens to appeal Forest Service decisions.

NEPA, which applies to all federal actions, not just on National Forests, currently requires citizen involvement and public disclosure of environmental impacts. Bush/Rey are focusing on ways to limit scientific study of environmental impacts, and public access to information and legal challenge.

The Endangered Species Act, already weakened by lack of funding for the

agency which implements it – the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service — is also on the Bush/Rey chopping block. While Republicans in Congress look for ways to re-write this noble law completely out of existence, the Bush/Rey team is proposing exemptions to allow harmful logging projects to proceed.

Bush/Rey’s spin doctors are presenting all of these changes in environmental law as necessary “streamlining” in order to prevent “catastrophic wildfire”. The reality is that these changes in law will give

Since the American public would not stand for the total repeal of these laws, the Bush administration is targeting the implementing regulations of the laws to make piecemeal changes.

the Forest Service free reign to open our National Forests to timber industry chainsaws, with very little opportunity for public oversight. The industry profits enormously; the public and the wildlife lose the beautiful and irreplaceable benefit of undisturbed forests and undefiled streams.

At this point, most of these Bush/Rey changes are proposals open for public comment. Strong opposition from the public could stop or change these drastic measures.

RESOURCES:

<http://www.defenders.org/forests/forest/regulations.html>

- great information on the NFMA reg changes, includes link to the regulations themselves (there is a comment period on these regs until March 6th - we’ll have Action Alerts out in the new year.)

<http://www.defenders.org/forests/forest/nepa2.pdf> (Adobe Acrobat needed)

- great summary of the piecemeal NEPA exemptions already in force since Bush/Rey.

<http://ceq.eh.doe.gov/ntf/>

- Bush/Rey people also have a “NEPA Task Force” reviewing the entire law - their proposals have not yet been released, but this is their homepage. They are reviewing NEPA implementation to make it more “efficient” (read “ineffective”, or “industry-friendly”).

<http://www.savenationalforests.org/>

Christina Wulf is the outreach coordinator for Virginia Forest Watch.

Forest Service Continues Abuse of Virginia’s Old-Growth

By Christina Wulf, Steve Krichbaum & Greg Lipsomb

While many National Forests in the Southeast are enjoying some reprieve from logging after successful forest-protection lawsuits, Virginia’s George Washington and Jefferson continue to be pummeled with increasing numbers of timber sale proposals. Of particular concern is the visible trend of the Forest Service to target older-aged trees; to continue justifying logging based on the trumped-up need to “salvage” injured trees; to “restore forest health” by cutting old trees that are in “decline”; and to perpetually ignore the needs of all native biodiversity except “commercial tree species” and “game” animals (or the relative handful of nongame Appalachian species that might require fabricated early successional habitat). In other words, the situation in Virginia remains troubling.

A serious hurdle faced by forest-protection advocates in the Old Dominion is our state’s location in the federal court system. Unlike most of the Southeast, Virginia is part of the 4th circuit court of appeals, headquartered in Richmond. In response to citizen lawsuits, Virginia judges have consistently ruled that the Forest Service’s agency discretion overrules alleged illegalities, deceptions, and inadequacies in Forest Service timber sale decisions.

A particularly troubling recent example is the Hoover Creek timber sale, proposed for Little Mountain in Allegheny County, James River Ranger District. This is the largest sale of eastern old-growth in Virginia since the deplorable Hematite sale of 1997, on the very same district. Little Mountain supports a ridgeline complex of old-growth Dry-Mesic Oak Forest which could exceed 100 acres (personal letter, Aubrey Neas, M.S. – Biologist/Naturalist). The slopes in these areas are rocky and steep, likely providing protection for the trees during the last deforestation of these mountains a century ago. The crowns are huge and spreading, the trees widely spaced, the trunks massively satisfying to embrace.

Some areas of old growth display more mesophytic species composition. In fact, cove forests make up only 2% of the stands in this project area, and the Forest Service is proposing to cut them all to the ground. The old-growth here provides habi-

tat suitable for rare species such as the Coal Skink and Cerulean Warbler. However, as is the norm, proper surveys, inventories, and monitoring of these species and others have not been performed by the agency.

After visiting Little Mountain, Biologist Aubrey Neas recommended that a moratorium be placed on Forest Service logging of old-growth. Although the agency has a "Guidance for Conserving and Restoring Old-growth Forest Communities on National Forests in the Southern Region", these policies are not being followed by the GWJNFs. For example, the Forest Service ecologists have chosen not to classify the ridgeline Dry-Mesic Oak and Mixed Mesophytic Forest on Little Mountain as old-growth. Their reason? Sporadic signs of human disturbance, including the remains of an old logging road and several stumps.

Not mentioned however is that these signs of disturbance are at the very edge of the old forest stands, on the lower slopes, outside the old-growth complex. Unfortunately, a 4th Circuit judge would be unlikely to be swayed by this argument – the Forest Service's 'agency discretion' includes the power of defining old-growth, even without valid ecological reason. Yet it is clear that if the sites at Little Mountain are not old-growth, then the term has no meaning in Virginia.

Likewise the GWJNFs have failed thus far to follow through on the Guidance's charge: to design a network of old-growth areas, and "as an additional safeguard, the guidance provides for identifying small-sized areas to improve the distribution of a particular forest community type and to provide a 'stepping stone' effect between large-sized and medium-sized patches (p. 18)." This identification of old-growth areas is supposed to occur at both the forest plan level and at the site specific level of analysis. The failure to accomplish this is not unique to this sale; it is systematic across the Forests.

In addition to the ridgeline complex on Little Mountain, many more recent Forest Service timber sale proposals plan to log old-growth 'stepping stones' on the GWJNFs. Several acres of 125+ year old trees are slated to be logged in the proposed Cedar Bridge timber sale on the Glenwood/Pedlar Ranger District. Botanist Greg Lipscomb describes the forest as "an ideal area to be incorporated into old-growth forest management plans for the George Washington and Jefferson National Forest." The Fishy Road timber sale on the New Castle Ranger District will destroy a grove of old-growth forest, removing 140+ year old trees to build a new road. Several good-sized pockets of old-

growth oak will be logged in the Cove Mountain timber sale on the Lee RD. The Sugar Tree timber sale on the Deerfield District, Bark Camp timber sale on the Clinch, Putt and McJennings timber sales on the Glenwood/Pedlar, Canbe timber sale on the Dry River – the timber sales keep adding up, removing more and more of the oldest trees still alive in Virginia. And selling them to private timber corporations at taxpayer-subsidized discounts.

It is well known that Virginia and much of the East was denuded of Ancient Forest, first slowly as European settlers moved west, and then very quickly as industrial timber harvest boomed in the South following the Civil War. We cannot sit by and watch Virginia's recovering, diversifying old-growth forests be destroyed once more by greed.

The mission of the Forest Service must evolve with our understanding of forest ecology and of the human need for what is wild and ancient. It is time to make that change by taking a stand for Little Mountain's old-growth and stopping the Hoover Creek timber sale.

"Our life is shorter than flowers.
Then shall we mourn?"

No, we shall dance
Plant gardens
Dress in colors
And teach our children
To make the world more beautiful.

Because our life
Is shorter than flowers."
Toltec poem



West and western Virginia ~ US Forest Service assaults Potomac watersheds

By Steve Krichbaum

Drainages of the Shenandoah River occupy much of the Dry River and Lee Ranger Districts of the George Washington National Forest (GWNF). These watersheds originate high on the lofty slopes of Shenandoah and Great North Mountains, ridges that form the political boundary of the two Virginias. SEDG is concentrating its public forestland conservation efforts in these northernmost of the Forest's districts. Here can be found tracts of old-growth, roadless areas, special biological areas, and populations of rare and sensitive species.

Unfortunately, the US Forest Service often views these lands not as invaluable and irreplaceable parts of our natural heritage, but as places ripe for logging and road building.

The Slate project area lies in a portion of Great North Mountain that was part of the Big Schloss Roadless Area inventoried at 36,526 acres during the RARE II process in 1978. Its size in the latest inventory for the GWNF FEIS has been whittled down by 40% to 20,755 acres. Even the 1991 draft EIS for the GWNF Plan included this Great North Mountain area as part of the Roadless Area; it was inexplicably dropped when the Final EIS and Plan were released. This portion of Great North Mountain east of Forest Road (FR) 1018, west of FRs 93 and 371, and south of US 55 is a large *de facto* roadless area around 5,000 acres in size that is presently uninventoried by the FS. It may even be contiguous with the presently inventoried Big Schloss RA; the status of some of the trails/roads in the area is unclear (a great volunteer opportunity!). Cutting unit 4 is located in this large uninventoried roadless area. The Comment period on the pre-decisional Environmental Assessment ends on April 11, 2003.

The Lee ranger district is also planning more cutting in this roadless area. Just across the state line in Virginia, on the eastern slopes of Great North Mountain and the western slopes of Paddy Mountain, lies the project area for the proposed Paddy timber sale. The 2,827-acre Paddy timber sale, another management area 15 site, is in Shenandoah and Frederick counties and forms upper drainages of the Shenandoah River. Cutting units 5 and 6 of the Paddy project are part of the uninventoried Great North Mountain roadless area, while other proposed cutting units are in other unroaded lands that

are contiguous with the Big Schloss Roadless Area.

The state threatened Wood Turtle (*Clemmys insculpta*) is known to occur in this project area. A petition to list the turtles under the federal Endangered Species Act was submitted in 1994 to the US Fish and Wildlife Service, but the agency turned it down. This is the very southern margin of their global range. According to experts Carl Ernst and John McBreen, "All known colonies should be protected" (p. 457 of "Virginia's Endangered Species"). This species may be harmed by this timber sale.

The Dry River and Lee ranger districts of the GWNF are the only place in the entire Southern Region of the Forest Service where the Wood turtle is found. Yet it is not on the Regional Forester's "Sensitive Species" list.

While the FS says "[t]he proposed action is needed to meet the direction set in the . . . Plan," according to the 1993 Forest Plan, management area 15 lands are "Mosaics of Wildlife Habitat . . . that are managed to maintain or enhance habitat for wildlife favoring a mature forest environment with both temporary and permanent clearings, and freedom from disturbance during nesting, brood-rearing seasons." Natural clearings and canopy openings are not monitored or inventoried by the FS; the only gaps that count are those fabricated by humans. This type of logic leads one to the question: how can wildlife possibly survive without help from chainsaws and dozers?

This specific project site has several noteworthy aspects. The FS stand age database shows thirty acres to be over 130 years old. And a stand adjacent to units 5 and 6 is over 160 years old. According to the Forest Service, 130 years is the minimum age that stands of these forest types "will begin to develop attributes characteristic of old-growth conditions." And it must be remembered that the CISC (continuous inventory of stand conditions) data that the Forest Service compiles and relies upon is notoriously unreliable, particularly regarding the presence of old-growth.

Some very large, apparently healthy American Chestnuts (*Castanea dentata*) are growing in unit 2. In my experience wandering the woods, such sizable and thriving chestnuts are very rare. They should be preserved for their scientific value and poten-

tial genetic contribution to developing blight resistant chestnuts.

The same basic issues apply to the 3,153-acre Bonnet Hill timber sale area on the east slopes of Paddy Mountain southeast of Three High Heads peak in Shenandoah County, Virginia.

South of the Lee, the Dry River district also contains significant acreage in West Virginia. The Coyote timber sale, which has been decided, is located on the west slopes of Shenandoah Mountain in upper drainages of the South Fork South Branch Potomac River watershed northeast of Sugar Grove. Some of the acreage lies in unroaded lands contiguous to the 7,313-acre inventoried Dry River Roadless Area, a prime candidate for Wilderness designation in Pendleton County.

There Forest Service has further designs on Pendleton County. The Dice Run timber sale is located on the west slopes of Shenandoah Mountain in upper drainages of the South Fork South Branch Potomac River watershed northeast of US route 33 and southeast of Fort Seybert. Twenty-five acres proposed for intensive logging here are over 111 years in stand age by CISC measure.

"In general, we recommend that most stands with pines and oaks that exceed 100 to 125 years and have experienced little recent human disturbance, be considered to be in the early stages of old-growth." (D. L. White and F. T. Lloyd, 1998, "An Old-Growth Definition for Dry and Dry-Mesic Oak-Pine Forests", USDA General Technical Report SRS-23 at pg. 29) The 1,100-acre site contains oak, hemlock and white pine. This important consideration is additionally significant given that in the entire Valley and Ridge physiographic province of the Appalachian Mountains "[n]o documented examples of old-growth oak-pine exist to our knowledge." (*ibid* at 13)

The section of the National Forest containing this project area is a large (around 5,500 acres) uninventoried roadless area centered around Dunkle Knob. It is downslope from the Plan-designated Shenandoah Mountain Special Interest Area - Biological and contains habitat suitable for the globally rare Cow Knob Salamander (*Plethodon punctatus*) (mature deciduous forest over 2400' in elevation).

The Coyote and Dice Run project areas and Dry River Roadless Area are all found on Shenandoah Mountain. The majority of this massif exists as part of the GWNF. In fact it is probably the largest contiguous tract of public land between Great Smoky Mountains National Park and the Adirondack

State Park. A block of National Forest almost 400,000 acres in size is found here in Virginia and West Virginia.

Unfortunately, the Coyote and Dice Run logging are not the only depredations the Forest Service plans for Shenandoah Mountain. About ten miles northeast of the Dry River Roadless Area, a few miles east of the state-line in Virginia's Rockingham County, is the proposed Canbe timber sale. On June 5, 2002, the Dry River ranger district issued the decision to log 163 acres in eight cutting units in the Kretchie Mountain area. These stands are upland mixed-oak forest types with CISC ages of 91-109 years, again in Management Area 15. The sites are all found in drainages of Little Dry River, a tributary of the North Fork of the Shenandoah.

The five units on the southside of the River are on north-facing slopes and are particularly rich and mesic in character. These stands are also lower elevation sites with much of their acreage being riparian. Just about the entirety of units 2 and 4 are coves. Some sites express old-growth characteristics; unit 5 is nothing less than spectacular, with numerous trees 24"-30" in diameter, pits and mounds, and large snags and downed boles.

Calls of the Wood Thrush (*Hylocichla mustelina*) were heard here and units 1-5 certainly contain suitable habitat for the Wood turtle. The Dry River and Lee ranger districts of the GWNF are the only place in the entire Southern Region of the Forest Service where the turtle is found. Yet it is not on the Regional Forester's "Sensitive Species" list.

In fact it is probably the largest contiguous tract of public land between Great Smoky Mountains National Park and the Adirondack State Park.

To their credit the agency is proposing to "close" (with gates) one mile of permanent road to the public in order to move toward meeting the Plan standard (leaving around nine miles more to be closed). Of course, the roads are still there, just gated, and they are proposing to make an already undesirable condition even worse with more road construction. SEDG appealed this timber sale and it was recently rejected by the Forest Service.

Then on July 9 of 2002 the Lee district issued a scoping letter for the Sours Supin proposed logging. This 3,098 acre

project area is situated on Supin Lick and Little North Mountains in western Rockingham county about ten miles northeast of the Canbe area. These slopes drain into Sours Run and Mill Creek, other tributaries of the North Fork of the Shenandoah. They do not disclose to the public how many miles of road they want to push through the forest. The stands proposed for cutting have CISC ages of 81-130 years. Wood turtles are known to inhabit the Shoemaker River hydrologic unit where the project lies. Amazingly, even *before* environmental analysis has commenced, the agency already states "there are no controversial or unusual aspects to this project."

As in many other areas in the National Forests of Virginia and West Virginia, the Forest Service has not established a valid "need" for logging. Management Area 16, along with MA 14 and MA 15, is one of the Forest's "wildlife management areas", so wildlife is supposedly the priority here. Reasonable management activities must be based upon the actual needs of wildlife, not just the desire of timber managers to "balance age classes" of stands (a condition that does not occur naturally). Yet the agency does not have the most basic monitoring and population inventory numbers for the wildlife species found here, not even for their own

As in many other areas in the National Forests of Virginia and West Virginia, the Forest Service has not established a valid "need" for logging.

"management indicator species." How can they establish a reasonable rationale to intensively log this specific area? The answer, of course, is that they cannot.

The maturing eastern National Forests do not need any more destabilizing interference from mankind, not even those hundreds of so-called "insignificant" acts the agency signs-off-on daily. As regards responsible management philosophy, we credit the U.S. Forest Service as they are way out ahead of the forestry profession in general. The agency has great potential. Still, violations of the National Forest Management Act and National Environmental Policy Act are business as usual in the National Forests of Virginia and West Virginia.

SEDG is engaged in each of the timber sales mentioned above save two, the Bonnett Hill and Coyote sales have been decided and will move forward. Our appeal on the Canbe timber sale was rejected for spu-

rious technical reasons, and not judged on its merits. Unless we decide to sue, this sale will go forward. The remaining sales are at various stages in process.

Ecosystems have no formal political status. Streams, photosynthesis, turtles, fungi and salamanders don't vote. So it is up to each of us reading this to never forget the others who are not officially represented. By all means visit these wonderful places, but even if you can not, please contact the Forest Service and tell them what you think about their proposals.

CONTACTS:

1. Dry River Ranger District
District Ranger Anthony Martoglio
112 North River Rd.
Bridgewater, VA 22812
540-828-2591
2. Lee Ranger District - GWNF
District Ranger James Smalls
109 Molineu Rd.
Edinburg, VA 22824
540-984-4101
3. George Washington National Forest
Supervisor William Damon
5162 Valleypointe Parkway
Roanoke, VA 24019
1-888-265-0019

Steve Krichbaum is the Conservation Director for SEDG and also works with Virginia Forest Watch

YOU'RE INVITED TO THE 2003 VIRGINIA BIOBLITZ!

WHAT: The object of the BioBlitz is to list as many plants and animals as possible within a 30 hour period. The Virginia BioBlitz is intended to raise public awareness of the state's incredible biodiversity. It also provides an opportunity for professional biologists, students, and naturalists to work together in the field. Survey teams include plants (vascular and non-vascular), vertebrates (reptiles, amphibians, fishes, mammals, birds) and invertebrates (spiders and their kin, butterflies and moths, dragonflies and damselflies, and beetles).

WHERE: The 2003 Virginia BioBlitz will be held at Douthat State Park (DSP). Located in Bath County just north of Clifton Forge off Interstate 64, DSP provides a wonderful opportunity to survey the flora and fauna of the Alleghany Mountains in western Virginia.

WHEN: Beginning at 9 AM on Saturday, May 17th and ending at 3 PM on Sunday, May 18th.

HOW: There will be free accommodations for camping in DSP on both Friday and Saturday night. Meals (Friday dinner through Sunday lunch, including an outdoor grill on Saturday night) will be provided at \$10 per person.

Want to Volunteer? Enthusiastic volunteers with all levels of expertise are needed to help with the survey. Please contact arthurevans@earthlink.net if you would like to join one of the survey teams. This is a great opportunity for anyone interested in adding to the knowledge of Virginia's flora and fauna and working with other biologists and naturalists in the field.

For more information: Visit <http://fwie.fw.vt.edu/vnhs/bioblitz.htm>.

The 2003 Virginia BioBlitz is co-sponsored by the Virginia Natural History Society, the Entomological Society of Washington, the Richmond Herp and Bug Society, and the Virginia Herpetological Society. Other participating institutions and societies currently include: Smithsonian Institution, USDA-ARS, Virginia Division of State Parks, Virginia Division of Natural Heritage, Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries, Virginia Museum of Natural History, Virginia Commonwealth University, University of Richmond, Hampton University, Richmond Audubon Society, and the Virginia Native Plant Society.

Action Calendar

SEDG Office/Events Hotline: (804) 971-1553, or email SEDG at sedg@firstva.com for more information.

April:

19th: Celebrate the 14th annual G.R.E.A.T. Earth Day in central Virginia on Mayo Island in Richmond, VA. 2,500 visitors expected! Food, fun, live music, crafts, and tons of non-profits to learn from! For more information: www.earthdayva.org.

19th: Celebrate Earth Day 2003 with the Blue Ridge Environmental Network in Roanoke, VA. For more information on local activities call Bill Modica at (540)387-2782.

22nd: Earth Day!!!!

22nd: National day of action against weakening forest protection regulations. For more details check the SEDG voicemail.

26th: National day of action against Office Depot and Office Max. Join SEDG at a demonstration outside of Office Max in Charlottesville to encourage the office supply store to better its recycled paper purchasing policies. For more information give us a call or send us an e-mail.

29th-May 1st: "Water Securing Virginia's Future", the 14th annual Environment Virginia, Virginia Military Institute, Lexington, Virginia. Secretary of Natural Resources, Tayloe Murphy, will be special guest. For more information: www.environmentva.org.

May:

3rd: Sustainable Forestry Retreat, presented by Next Generation Woods, at Mountain Lake in Giles County, VA, 9am-5pm. Cost is \$30/person. For a registration form, send an e-mail to www.foresters-inc.com.

21st: New River Land Trust presents, "Saving Land: A Road Map to Conservation Easements for Professionals & Landowners", Donaldson Brown Conference Center, Virginia Tech Campus, Blacksburg, VA. For more information: (540) 951-1704.

23rd-26th: Annual Heartwood Forest Council Meeting in Blanton, KY. If you'd like to join us, give us a call and we can arrange a carpool. For more information: www.heartwood.org

June:

1st-6th: Forest Protection Week in D.C. For more information on how to get involved, contact Max Wilson at American Lands, (202)547-5574.

16th-23rd: 2003 Eastern Forest Protection Defense Camp in Southeastern Ohio (near Athens), hosted by the Buckeye Forest Council and Kentucky Heartwood. For more information: susan@buckeyeforestcouncil.org.

20th: SEDG Party!!! Join us for live music, food and fun. Festivities start at 8pm, refreshments will be provided. Location TBA -- check the SEDG voicemail for details.

For more information on any of these events, feel free to call the SEDG office!!

Shenandoah Ecosystems Defense Group
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