



Signal Corps Knob Timber Sale - Cancelled! In the George Washington National Forest

In December 2005, the US Forest Service announced plans for the Signal Corps Knob timber sale in the George Washington National Forest. This timber sale would have included 230 acres of logging (some old growth) and 1.4 miles of road construction in the heart of Shenandoah Mountain. Members of Wild Virginia visited the timber sale “cutting units” to document the old trees and sent comments opposing the sale to the Forest Service. In April 2006, the Forest Service chose the “no action alternative” (the first time in over **10 years**) and dropped plans for this timber sale. This is a Wild Virginia success story!

Shenandoah Mountain, where the proposed timber sale was located, is a 60 mile stretch of National Forest west of Staunton and Harrisonburg, VA. It is the largest block of publicly owned, contiguous forest in the eastern U.S. that is not permanently protected. It is an incredible opportunity for forest conservation. While Wild Virginia has challenged many timber sales around the edges of Shenandoah Mountain, this was one of the few sales located right in the middle. The Forest Service acknowledges that this is important habitat for black bear and other species sensitive to disturbance.

In March, Wild Virginia led twelve people through the area on old logging roads to view cutting units 1, 3, 4, 5, and 7. Off trail we hiked up an incredibly steep hill at unit #2, and through old-growth for-

est at unit #8. There we saw dozens of trees over 100 cm (40”) in diameter. We saw lots of black bear evidence, and we spotted the amazing wood frog, which can hibernate in a block of ice over winter, thaw in spring, and hop away. The remoteness of this area is impressive. There are tall mountain peaks in every direction and one could walk south along the ridges for 30 miles without seeing a single person.

Steve Krichbaum of Wild Virginia and Sherman Bamford of Virginia Forest Watch wrote comments to the Forest Service citing violations of environmental laws and cited a variety of reasons to cancel the sale. They expressed our concerns regarding sensitive species, soil erosion, water quality, historical preservation and recreational opportunities.



Wild Virginia Board Members Mike Kruse and Ernie Reed measure a large diameter Chestnut Oak on Signal Corps Knob.

This sale was dropped because of Steve and Sherman’s work collecting information on the area, and because we have laws like the National Envi-



Wood frog, *Rana sylvatica*, in forests of Signal Corps Knob on GWNF.

ronmental Policy Act in place, which allows for public comment on timber sales on public land.

“Sometimes you don’t know exactly how you are going to win,” said Steve Krichbaum, “but if you do everything you can, good things can happen.”

While we celebrate this important victory, we continue to work for better management on our National Forest, particularly on Shenandoah Mountain. Industrial logging and its associated road building belong on private timberland. A brighter future for our National Forests involves restoring damaged ecosystems, and promoting ecologically friendly recreation. It’s a quality of life issue, for black bears, wood frogs, and people.

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Please contact Wild Virginia if you are interested in visiting and/or working to protect Shenandoah Mountain.

Wild Virginia Hikes and Outings

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

Past Outing Report: May '06 Trillium Hike

On a beautiful May afternoon, Wild Virginia members went on an unforgettable hike through the "Trillium Fields" at the Thompson Wildlife Management Area in Fauquier County, VA. Gary Fleming, Ecologist with the Division of Natural Heritage, led the hike and described how the incredible wildflower display is due to rich soils in the area and rocky slopes that protected the area from intensive logging. Prior to its ownership by the Dept. of Game & Inland Fisheries, the area was selectively logged, which allowed the understory herb flora to remain intact, as opposed to large clear-cuts, which can wipe out all understory flora and take hundreds of years to recover.

We hiked through the area during the peak bloom and all participants could see why many consider this area to be the best display of Trillium (*Trillium grandiflora*) in the state. The wildflowers were in bloom as far as the eye could see! Gary also led us off the trail to a large seepage swamp. The swamp stays saturated at the surface over much of the year due to groundwater seepage and supports a number of interesting (and some rare) wetland plants.

A spring trip to Thompson Wildlife Management Area is well worth the visit and we hope to visit again next year with more Wild Virginia members!

Contact Person

Mike Kruse

mold@nexet.net; (434) 293-7401

Contact Mike if you are planning on attending. Also call with any questions, for directions, or if you'd rather meet the group in the forest.

Tour de Cut with Wild Virginia, the Sierra Club and Virginia Forest Watch

Join nearly all of Virginia's forest protection groups for a weekend in the woods. We will hike through a recently cut timber sale Saturday morning and do a victory loop at the recently cancelled Signal Corps Knob timber sale Saturday afternoon. We will camp near the Thunder Ridge Wilderness Saturday night and on Sunday hold an important workshop on the George Washington National Forest Plan revision which is scheduled to begin this fall.

When & Where:

Saturday-Sunday, **July 15th & 16th**. 8 am. Meet at Java Java, 2214 Ivy Road (by Sneak Reviews) in Charlottesville, or call for alternative meeting locations.

Hike Details:

There are many details. Please call the contact person if you are interested in going or go to: www.virginiaforestwatch.org. Join us for only part of the weekend if you'd like. For the hikes, bring water and lunch. For camping bring a tent and camping gear as well as food for dinner and breakfast and lunch the next day.

Beat the heat! Swimming Hole Hike

Join members of Wild Virginia on a refreshing hike to a local swimming hole. Details will be posted on the Wild Virginia listserv and at www.wildvirginia.org

When & Where:

Sunday **August 27th**, meet at 9 am. Meet at Java Java, 2214 Ivy Road (by Sneak Reviews) in Charlottesville.

Hawk Migration Hike in the Blue Ridge

It's September and time for the Hawk migration! Join us on an easy hike to overlooks where we can watch the great Hawk Migration. Just 30 minutes from Charlottesville and an easy walk. This is a great outing for kids. Bring the whole family!

When & Where:

Sunday **September 17th**, meet at 9 am. Meet at Java Java, 2214 Ivy Road (by Sneak Reviews) in Charlottesville.

Hike Details:

We'll be hiking on trails and taking long breaks at overlooks to watch for hawks. This is an easy to moderate hike. Bring lunch and water, and binoculars if you'd like. We should be back in Charlottesville around 5 pm. Call Contact person for rain date information.

Timber Sale Hike in the George Washington NF

Join Wild Virginia members on a hike through a recently cut timber sale. This is a great opportunity to learn first hand why Wild Virginia is working hard to protect our National Forests.

When & Where:

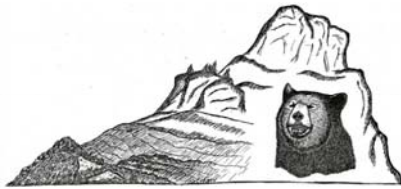
Sunday **October 15th**, meet at 9 am. Meet at Java Java, 2214 Ivy Road (by Sneak Reviews) in Charlottesville.

Hike Details:

To be announced.

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WILD VIRGINIA



Protecting Your Favorite Wild Places

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Submissions

We welcome submissions of articles, op-ed, poetry, cartoons, photos, drawings, etc. Please try to keep text under one typed page. Please be advised that we reserve the right to edit for space. Our next issue will be coming out in Fall 2006 so please submit by Sept. 1st. Thanks!

Donations to Wild Virginia are gratefully accepted. Please make checks payable to VOP (our fiscal sponsor) and send to address above.

Ancient Mountain Sentinel is printed on 100% recycled, non-chlorine bleached paper. Your use of this or similar paper will prevent the destruction of native forests. **Recycle.... Pass this newsletter on to a friend!**

Roadless Area Update: USDA Accepts Roadless Area Petition for Virginia

In the last Wild Virginia newsletter, we reported on the great news that Governor Tim Kaine had petitioned the US Department of Agriculture and sent a letter directly to Agricultural Secretary Mike Johanns (who oversees the management of all National Forests) asking for full protection of roadless areas in Virginia. His letter was accompanied by a petition signed by more than 5,000 Virginians asking the Forest Service to reinstate the 2001 Roadless Rule. The Bush Administration repealed the Roadless Rule in 2005 and established a new rule requiring each state to petition the federal government to protect roadless areas.

On June 21, 2006, Secretary Johanns **approved** petitions from Governor Kaine, North Carolina Governor Mike Easley, and South Carolina Governor Mark Sanford to develop state-specific rules for managing roadless areas in the three states. Together, the states have 567,674 acres of roadless areas: 387,674 acres in Virginia, 172,000 acres in North Carolina, and 8,000 acres in South Carolina.

This is, indeed, an important step towards establishing permanent roadless area protection in Virginia and reflects what Virginia citizens have expressed over and over again – that these last wild places of our national forests should be protected for future generations. Wild Virginia applauds Secretary Mike Johanns for listening to the public and making a commitment to work with Governor Kaine and the state on the conservation and management of Virginia's roadless areas.

Governor Tim Kaine said, "My administration looks forward to beginning the rulemaking process as we continue working to protect the important roadless areas in our national forests. I commend the Secretary's decision, and appreciate the Committee's thoughtful review of Virginia's petition."

According to the USDA press release, "the Forest Service will now work with Virginia to develop and publish proposed state-specific rules that address the management requirements set forth in the petitions. The state-specific rulemaking process will include any required National Environmental Policy Act analysis and invite public input during a notice and comment period. USDA will make the determination on the adoption of any final federal rule." This process does **NOT** ensure full protection of roadless areas and it is important that Governor Kaine continue to pressure the Forest Service for protection as they work to develop rules for managing Virginia's roadless areas. Only Congressional action or Presidential order can permanently protect these areas.

Please send letters of support to Governor Tim Kaine and say THANK YOU for being one of the first Governors in the nation to petition the USDA for full protection of Virginia's roadless areas.

Governor Tim Kaine
Patrick Henry Building, 3rd Floor
1111 East Broad Street
Richmond, VA 23219; 804-786-2211

Thank you for helping in the effort to protect Virginia's last wild places!

Public Lands Legislative Update

There are many bills pending before the U.S. Congress that would impact public lands. The “Good Bills” are supported by Wild Virginia and certain Virginia Congresspersons, whom we list and offer thanks. Then we list the “Bad Bills.” We list the Virginia Congresspersons who support the bad bills. If you do not know who your Representative is, please go to this website: <http://www.house.gov/> or call Wild Virginia 434-971-1553 and we'll help you.

Please note that **Congressman Bob Goodlatte** (R-VA-6) from Roanoke represents most of the George Washington National Forest and Shenandoah Valley. He is the Chairman of the House Agriculture Committee where most legislation regarding National Forests is reviewed. He is a powerful Congressman and historically opposes most Wilderness and conservation measures on National Forests. **If you live in, or know someone who lives in Bob Goodlatte's district, it is especially important that you write to him in support of these bills.**

If you have time for only one letter, please write to support the first bill below. Hand-written letters are best, followed by emails, then post cards. We encourage you to write often!

HR 1975/S.942 Virginia Ridge and Valley Act of 2005: This bill, introduced by Congressman **Rick Boucher** (D-VA-9) in the House and Senator **John Warner** (R-VA) in the Senate, would establish 55,000 acres of new protected areas on the Jefferson National Forest in Virginia. Specifically, the bill would create the Seng Mountain and Bear Creek Scenic Areas and the following areas would be added to the National Wilderness Preservation Sys-

tem: Brush Mountain, Brush Mountain East, Garden Mountain, Hunting Camp Creek, Lynn Camp Creek, Raccoon Branch, Stone Mountain, and additions will be made to the following existing Wildernesses: Mountain Lake, Kimberling Creek, Lewis Fork, Little Wilson Creek, Peters Mountain, and Shawvers Run. For more information and sample letters please go to www.wildvirginia.org or www.virginiawilderness.org. This bill is supported by Congressman Tom Davis (R-VA-11), James Moran (D-VA-8), Bobby Scott (D-VA-3), and Frank Wolf (R-VA-10).

HR 3563 National Forest

Roadless Area Conservation Act: This bill, supported by Virginia Congressmen Boucher, Moran and Scott, would codify the 2001 Roadless Area Conservation Rule as law. The bill would protect over 58 million acres of roadless lands. Senator John Warner supports this bill. Don't be fooled! Governor Kaine's roadless petition is a good thing but it still leaves the management of roadless areas open to interpretation by the Forest Service. That means they're not protected.

HR 3166 Multiple-Use Conflict Resolution Act of 2005: This bill, introduced by Congressman Raul Grijalva (D-AZ-7) and supported by Virginia Congressman Moran, would provide compensation to any holder of a grazing permit on public land who voluntarily relinquishes their permit and removes their animals.

S 1541 Public Land Protection and Conservation Act of 2005: This bill would establish a national grants program for targeted control of invasive species on public lands, among other programs focused on

protecting native biodiversity. While this bill might encourage widespread use of herbicides, the intent is sound. Use your judgment in supporting this bill.

HR 3107 Ecosystem Protection Act of 2005: This bill, introduced by Robert Andrews (D-NJ-1) would establish a set of core areas as reserves for ecosystem protection and water quality. It would also allow land acquisition to add to the core reserves and allow buyout of grazing permits on public lands.

BAD BILLS:

HR 4200 Forest Emergency Recovery and Research Act: Also known as the “Walden Bill.” Briefly, this bill would eliminate environmental review under NEPA for post-disaster projects on national forests. U.S. Forest Service reports show that at least 34% of all logging over the last six years would qualify for NEPA waivers (no environmental or public review) under this bill. Congressman Goodlatte supports this bill as does Virgil Goode. Ask them what the heck they are thinking! For more info visit www.safc.org/campaigns/walden_bill.php

There are dozens of other bills affecting your public lands. Please search <http://thomas.loc.gov> for more information.



View of Shenandoah Mountain, GWNF.

Species Spotlight

Eastern Cougar (*Puma concolor cougar*)

By Chris Bolgiano

BIO: Chris Bolgiano is the author of Mountain Lion: An Unnatural History of Pumas and People. Her newest book, The Eastern Cougar Anthology: Historic Accounts, Scientific Investigations, and New Evidence, is a compilation of eastern cougar source materials, including scientific confirmations of field evidence. She is on the Board of Directors of the Eastern Cougar Foundation, a non-profit dedicated to recovery of wild cougars in the East.

Wildlife officialdom is abuzz about the purported rediscovery of the ivory-billed woodpecker, but there's a whale of a lot more evidence for multiple cougars in the East than there is for a single Lord God bird. Once the top native predator throughout the forests of eastern North America, cougars (also known as mountain lions, panthers, pumas, catamounts, and dozens of other names) were believed extirpated by 1900. Biologists attributed the persistent sightings of cougars to drunkenness, delusion, or deceit. "There's never any field evidence," was the official response -- until the 1990s, when the situation changed dramatically.

Confirmed field evidence began to accumulate, and at an astonishing rate. Several dozen documentations in the form of DNA and other analyses by highly regarded scientists can now be found in peer-reviewed scientific journals, reputable newspaper articles, and governmental agency reports. To avoid looking completely incompetent, state and federal agencies have had to acknowledge that there are a few cougars living wild in the East. To sidestep any responsibility for a wide-ranging predator that very, very rarely does kill people and livestock, agencies have shifted the argument to a question of origins. The official line now is that the cats being documented couldn't possibly be remnant natives and must be

FERCs (feral escaped or released captives) from subspecies other than the eastern cougar (*Puma concolor cougar*), which along with the Florida panther subspecies (*Puma concolor coryi*) are the only cougars protected by the Endangered Species Act.

Genetic differentiation among cougars is so minimal that even DNA analysis can't reliably distinguish between subspecies. All cougar subspecies can interbreed. And due to a lack



Michael McNelly

of samples, no genetic profile of the eastern cougar subspecies can ever be defined. So what is an eastern cougar? The answer can only be: A cougar that lives wild in the East.

The cougars that are being confirmed around the East come from three possible sources. Remnant natives may have survived in remote, rugged areas, and there are places where local people have never stopped reporting cougars. Migrants from established populations in Rocky Mountain states and Florida are being tracked on long journeys east and north. Escaped or released captives are an almost certain reality, due to the extensive black market in cute cougar kittens and their disagreeable nature as adult pets. What's probably happening in our woods is a mix of all three sources: A cougar kitten killed by a

truck in Kentucky in 1997 was proven through DNA analysis to have a female ancestor with South American genes and a North American father who may well have been wild.

Recognition of these cougars wouldn't require drastic changes from current land uses, although they -- like a great many other wildlife species -- will depend on slowing the loss of habitat to sprawl and establishing protected travel corridors between blocks of public land. All western states with cougars have developed successful educational programs on cougar biology and behavior, providing models for eastern states. Deer herds in the East, cougars' favorite prey, are so numerous as to cause serious agricultural, motor vehicle, and disease problems. Yet even with unarguable field evidence and favorable habitat conditions for cougar recovery, wildlife officials refuse to change their policy of denial.

Clearly, something other than a demand for scientific validation is at work here. Political support for state wildlife agencies comes in large measure from deer hunters, who generally perceive cougars as direct competitors, despite decades of scientific evidence that undermines this belief. Here is where educational campaigns must begin.

The bottom line is that origins don't matter; a wild cougar is a wild cougar. What matters is that cougars are trying to reclaim their ancient ecological niche. The question about eastern cougars is no longer whether they are there, or even where they come from, but how we as a society will respond to the unprecedented second chance they offer us for better stewardship of our land.



Got any time to spare?

Wild Virginia can only accomplish our mission through the dedication of our members and volunteers. We always welcome volunteers and currently need help with the following capacities:

Hike Coordinator: Volunteers will work with Mike Kruse to select new and interesting spots to visit with Wild Virginia members for our monthly Outings. We are looking for a volunteer to help coordinate 3-4 outings per year. What is *your* favorite spot to visit in Virginia? Please call Mike, (434) 293-7401, if you can help.

Outreach: Volunteers will work to reach the public and environmental advocates through tabling, meetings and literature. Responsibilities include developing and distributing campaign outreach materials, representing Wild Virginia at festivals and events, and identifying events for tabling and speaking.

Office Administration: Volunteers will help insure smooth and effective office operations. Administrative volunteers help with data entry, proofreading, the production of our newsletter and bulk mailings, and assist with office duties.

If you would like more information on one of the above opportunities, or if you have other special skills to donate, please contact us at (434) 971-1553 or at info@wildvirginia.org. **We look forward to working with you!**

WILD VIRGINIA

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