



Legislation to Benefit Virginia's National Forests

Help Urge Legislators to Protect Roadless Areas & Create New Wilderness Areas

There are currently two bills in the U.S. Congress that would permanently protect many special areas in the national forests of Virginia. In June, Conservation Director David Hannah spent two days on Capitol Hill meeting with staff of six area legislators, encouraging support for these bills and discussing issues relevant to the Forest Plan revision for the George Washington National Forest (GWNF). Please help Wild Virginia and our partners in seeing these bills come to fruition - Contact members of Congress and urge their support!

The Virginia Ridge and Valley Act of 2007 would protect almost 55,000 acres in the Jefferson National Forest. John Warner introduced this bill in the Senate (S. 570) on February 13, with Jim Webb as cosponsor. On the same day, Rep. Rick Boucher (9th District) introduced the bill in the House of Representatives (H.R. 1011), with one California and five Virginia representatives as cosponsors – Jo Ann Davis (1st Dist.), Tom Davis (11th Dist.), Jim Moran (8th Dist.), Bob Scott (3rd Dist.), and Frank Wolf (10th Dist.). The bill will establish six new Wilderness Areas, expand an existing one, and create one Wilderness Study Area and two National Scenic Areas.

The Roadless Area Conservation Act of 2007 was introduced on May 24 in both houses of Congress. Senators John Warner and Maria Cantwell (D-WA) introduced the bill

in the Senate (S. 1478), and Jim Webb was one of 17 cosponsors. There are currently 144 cosponsors of the bill in the House (H.R. 2516), including three Virginia representatives – Rick Boucher, Jim Moran, and Bob Scott. This bill will protect the approximately 58.5 million acres of inventoried roadless areas in all our national forests. Roughly 394,000 acres in Virginia's two national forests would be protected.



Ramsey's Draft Wilderness Area. Photo by Clint Farlinger.

The roadless area bill has tremendous potential to protect existing special places while creating a foundation upon which genuine forest restoration can occur. Prohibiting new roads and other types of development (and the logging that usually accompanies it) will help restore large blocks of mature forest where human disturbance is minimized. Surrounded as they are by intensely managed forest and private land that continues to be developed,

these roadless areas are truly "islands" of quality forest and habitat in a "sea" of disturbance. The biological diversity, air and water quality, aesthetics, and recreational opportunities in our Southern Appalachians will be greatly enhanced with passage of this bill.

As many readers know, the tale of roadless area protection is a long and twisting one. In 1998, an 18 month moratorium was placed on road building in the roadless areas of our national forests. The Forest Service began a lengthy and very public rule-making process. After more than 600 public meetings, a record number of comments, and rigorous scientific review, the Roadless Area Conservation Rule was established in January, 2001. Once it took office though, the Bush administration quickly suspended the rule. Alaska's Tongass National Forest (our nation's largest) was later exempted from the rule, and in 2005, the rule was suspended altogether in favor of a state-by-state process of roadless area review.

In November 2006, a federal court judge ruled the Bush administration's repeal of the Roadless Rule was illegal. For the moment, the 2001 Roadless Rule is in effect (though Tongass NF is still exempted). This most recent ruling reinstating the 2001 rule is being challenged, and there is no way to predict the

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Wild Virginia Update

Letter from our President, Eric Gilchrist

The environment is big news in the mainstream media today! Al Gore is more popular than ever with his dedicated and sincere effort to get ordinary folks to understand there are more potential looming difficulties about to hit us.

Big and small corporations are starting to recognize that a significant portion of consumers care about what they purchase and how it may impact the planet and humankind. The corporate 'green' advertising machine is in full crank. The Washington DC think tanks are developing exotic and expensive technological solutions to deal with excess carbon dioxide to keep our rear ends from frying.

As an enlightened reader of our newsletter you probably already consider yourself an environmentalist at heart. Here is what I would like you to do: Remind yourself that every action you take has some implication on the planet, another human, or a wild creature. Do the best you can and please do not beat yourself up. Save that energy to

educate others and to persuade our decision makers to lead us on to bold positive changes.

Our hard-working board and conservation director met for a long weekend this past June to discuss how we can be more effective as an organization. From this meeting arose one important clear goal that I feel you can easily support. Other citizens will back it because it will save taxpayers' money and it is simple. **Let's permanently protect the Roadless Areas of the George Washington National Forest.** No more road building, cell towers, logging, power lines, mining or gas wells in these areas.

When people ask you why, tell them: These areas include the headwaters for millions of East Coast people's drinking water, they cool hot air blowing from the west, they sequester carbon dioxide, and they provide quiet zones for all of us from frantic human activity. Ecosystems like these left alone are our best friends and allies. Yet, these roadless areas make up only 1% of all the acres in

Virginia. Most of the other 99% of Virginia land is currently being compromised by human activity. The loudest opponents to complete protection of roadless areas are the timber companies, yet they can more easily acquire responsibly sourced timber from private Virginia lands. To build roads and infrastructure into the steep, wild and roadless areas will cost taxpayers lots of money to subsidize logging.

I'd like to remind you that we at Wild Virginia appreciate responsible wood products coming from good forestry practices, the fair hunting of game, and safe fishing. Most Virginians would like to see permanent protection for roadless and wild sensitive areas. These wild lands belong to everyone and do not exist for private exploitation. As we move forward to work on passage of the Roadless Conservation Act of 2007, we will need your support. Contact your members of congress, invest in Wild Virginia and ensure the preservation of a wild George Washington National Forest for generations to come.

Meet New Board Member, Chris Bowlen

Chris Bowlen received a BS in Chemistry from WVU, then worked as a chemist at Eastman Kodak in Rochester NY, University of Washington in Seattle, WA and Schering Plough in Bloomfield NJ. After moving to VA in 1996, Chris retired from chemistry to raise her two daughters and work on restoring their house. She is currently stewarding 10 acres in the Shenandoah Valley, which involves restoring a damaged woodland area and running a small, sustainable organic farm. Chris and her husband, Gene, have been committed to environmental issues and to living as close to green as possible since the early '80s. Chris is a member of the VA Native Plant Society and a VA Master Naturalist and enjoys being outside in all 4 seasons, especially in the George Washington National Forest.

And Volunteer Outings Coordinator, Heather Horn

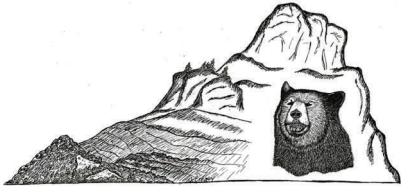
Heather Horn moved to the Central Virginia region eight years ago as a student at the University of Virginia and is now a pediatric nurse practitioner at UVA Children's Hospital. She has a passion for hiking and has been a nature guide for Ivy Creek Natural Area's school nature walk program and for the Wildlife Center of Virginia's Bear Oak program. In addition, she spent the summer volunteering at Camp Holiday Trails. Heather likes to look at her life as an ongoing workshop or camp where she learns a little more every day about the blessings of our national forests and parks.



WELCOME Chris and Heather!

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WILD VIRGINIA



Protecting Your Favorite Wild Places

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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, September 15th Ramsey's Draft Wilderness

Join Wild Virginia Saturday, September 15 on one of Virginia's finest hikes. Ramsey's Draft Trail/Jerry's Run/Shenandoah Mountain Trail make a moderate, "not too long" 7 mile loop hike that includes ridge tops, steep canyons, old growth, rock hopping and many stream crossings. Plan on getting your feet wet, one way or another.

Meet at Java-Java on Old Ivy Road in Charlottesville at 8am to carpool or meet at the USFS/GWNP Mountain House Picnic area on 250 west of Staunton at 10am. From I-81 north of Staunton, take exit 225, the Woodrow Wilson Parkway, and head west. You'll reach US 250 in about 5.5 miles. Turn right (west) on US 250 and 20 miles later you will see the Mountain House Picnic Area on your right. Park there as it will be the terminus of our hike. From there we will shuttle/carpool to Confederate Breastworks and hike the loop, returning to Ramsey's Draft/Mountain House parking/Picnic area around 4pm. Carpoolers should be back to C'ville by 6 or so. For more information, contact Ernie at 434-971-1647.

Sunday, October 14th Mount Pleasant National Scenic Area

Join Wild Virginia on Sunday, October 14, 2007 for a fall hike to Mount Pleasant in Oronoco, Virginia. Designated by Congress in 1994 as the Mount Pleasant National Scenic Area, the trail has an east and a west summit; both with spectacular views. Fall foliage should be at it's peak for this (approximately) five-mile, moderate hike. Make sure to bring a camera!

Other necessities are sturdy shoes, a jacket (it can be windy!), water, and a bagged lunch.

To carpool from Charlottesville, please meet us at Java Java on Rt. 250 at 9am. Otherwise, you can meet us at the trailhead around 10:30am. For more information, please contact Jen at 434-971-1553.

Sunday, November 11th Blackrock Summit and Trayfoot Mountain

We'll visit two summits with interesting geology and beautiful vistas to observe the fall colors in a wild area of Shenandoah National Park. The weather can be excellent then for a fantastic hike like this. It is hunting season then, and we'll be safe since the SNP strictly prohibits hunting within the park

On Sunday, November 11 meet at 9 am at Java Java, 2214 Ivy Rd (by Sneak Reviews) in Charlottesville, call Eric for our meeting spot in Staunton or alternative meeting locations. We'll try to organize shuttles for hikers to the trail head.

During the hike we'll make an easy visit to Blackrock Summit from Skyline Drive and the AT, and then head for the less visited Trayfoot Mountain summit. This hike could be a loop hike, but will more likely be an out and back totaling 8 miles. Bring hiking shoes, lunch, water and appropriate clothing for the weather. We should be back in Charlottesville around 6:00 pm. Call for rain date information.

Contact Leaders: Eric Gilchrist 434-293-8039, ericg@ntelos.net and Heather Horn 703-732-3419.

Wild Virginia Advocates Species Protection, Renewable Energy

In the past few months, Wild Virginia has taken several steps to protect wildlife species and resources in the George Washington National Forest (GWNF). In July, we sent a letter to the West Virginia Division of Natural Resources urging them to act on our proposal for a Special Biological Area in the Lee Ranger District of the GWNF. This special area is centered on a known population of wood turtles (*Glyptemys insculpta*) and, through protection and proper management, would help ensure the long term viability of this imperiled species in the forest. We have proposed this action to Virginia state agencies and the Forest Service in the past and will continue to push this proposal through the Forest Plan revision process when it resumes.

Wild Virginia has also endorsed

positions and specific requests made by other conservation organizations. In each instance, we are advocating actions that are vital to the long-term sustainability of a healthy and whole GWNF. We will continue to “sign on” to important documents in the future as well. Four documents we recently signed are:

Letter to U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS), from Heartwood. The letter opposes the April 2007 draft Recovery Plan for the federally endangered Indiana bat (*Myotis sodalis*) and calls for more rigorous analysis of population size requirements. Recommendations in the draft plan are inadequate to ensure the species’ recovery.

Letter to USFWS, from Friends of Blackwater. The letter opposes a proposal to “delist” the federally endangered West Virginia northern flying

squirrel (*Glaucomys sabrinus fuscus*). The proposal has been questioned by squirrel scientists and members of the recovery team. Past and current size of the population is unknown, making delisting unjustifiable.

Letter to USFS, from Southern Environmental Law Center. This letter discusses at length a number of issues and concerns the Forest Service should address in developing an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the new forest planning rules adopted in 2005 (see article below for more information on the planning process).

Renewable Electricity Statement of Principles sent to all members of U.S. Congress, sponsored by the Virginia Conservation Network. This statement calls for 20% of all electricity generated in the U.S. to come from renewable energy sources by 2020.

Laurel Run/Road Timber Sale

In February 2007, the USFS issued a Scoping Notice for the proposed Laurel Run/Road Timber Sale in the Lee Ranger District. Twenty-two cutting units totaling 484 acres were identified for harvest. Wild Virginia visited the site and submitted comments on the project.

Several issues are of concern and should be addressed before a decision on the project is reached. Among the concerns are the size of the project, proximity to the recently approved Great Little Timber Sale, cumulative effects of two large timber sales, proximity to two special sites – Falls Ridge and Big Schloss Roadless Area, potential water quality impacts (the project is within the watershed of two “impaired waterways” – Laurel Run and Stony Creek), and effects on wildlife species, specifically the wood turtle.

No schedule has been set by the USFS for making a decision. We will continue to monitor the project and take steps to protect the forest.

Forest Planning in the George Washington National Forest

As reported in our last newsletter, the process of revising the Forest Plan for the GWNF is “on hold” for the indefinite future. Changes to the national forest planning process that were instituted by the USFS in 2005 were found to be in violation of three laws by a federal appeals court this past February. The altered rules had several negative impacts. The Forest Service was no longer required to develop an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for Forest Plans, the requirement for significant public involvement in the planning process was removed, and formal consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service regarding rare, threatened and endangered species was no longer required.

The Forest Service is currently developing an EIS in hopes of meeting all legal requirements for their proposed rules change. Wild Virginia and many other organizations are opposed to these changes, and believe the original set of rules, finalized in 1982, should be used for all national forest planning.

If the Forest Service is able to meet all legal standards for adopting the 2005 rules change, forest planning in the GWNF would not begin before early 2008. GWNF staff have indicated they do not want to resume planning if there is a strong likelihood of legal challenges and will likely wait until all issues are settled before they resume planning. We believe this is a logical and prudent decision.

You may follow this process by checking for updates at our website, www.wildvirginia.org, or by joining our email listserv. You can also check the GWNF website for updates at www.fs.fed.us/r8/gwj/forestplan/revision. Wild Virginia will continue to monitor developments, and will once again become heavily involved when planning resumes.

Species Spotlight :Virginia big-eared bat

(*Corynorhinus townsendii virginianus*)

The Official Virginia State Bat

Article by Jason Halbert

This little wonder is state and federally endangered. It could be called the big-eared mountain bat, but it's other common names are "lump-nosed bat," and "mule-eared bat." This is one of the only bats that roosts all year in caves. Other bats, such as the federally endangered Indiana bat (*Myotis sodalis*) spend the warmer months of the year roosting in trees in the forest. All of the known caves housing Virginia big-eareds are in the mountains above roughly 1,500ft.

The bat exists only in Virginia, West Virginia, Kentucky and North Carolina (though some have recently been found in an abandoned mine in northwest South Carolina) and nowhere else on Earth.

In Virginia, Bath, Bland, Giles, Highland, Rockingham, Shenandoah and Tazewell counties are home to Virginia big-eareds. All of the known caves are on or near national forest property, making this bat an important animal in public lands management. These bats prefer limestone caves, but will also roost in other caves.

In 2005, Governor Mark Warner named this bat the official Virginia state bat at the request of the Virginia Cave Board. The only other state to have a state bat is Texas (which is home to some of the

largest bat colonies on Earth).

The life cycle of most bats is similar in that they mate annually but usually only produce one pup. For the big-eareds, maternity colonies are formed, usually in separate caves (two known sites in Virginia), in early April. Like all mammals, mothers give birth to live young and nurse them to help them grow. By the end of summer the young are foraging at night for insects. Virginia big-eared bats feed almost exclusively on moths, but will eat beetles, flying ants, wasps, flies and small humans (just kidding!). The decline of Virginia big-eareds is largely due to human disturbance in caves and roosting sites. Hibernating bats consume more energy when disturbed, especially during the critical winter months. Only recently (in the last 5-15 years) have many of the critical caves been gated and if the counts are correct, some populations are growing.

The largest colonies are in caves just over the state line in Pendleton County, WV with one cave housing roughly half of the estimated 10-20,000 individuals remaining. The caves in West Virginia are protected with locked gates (like prison bars) that keep humans out and allow the bats to fly through. There are likely many caves that used to house Virginia big-eareds but human intrusion has forced them out.

Despite an unfair reputation, bats are an important species in our lives. A single bat of a certain species can consume upwards of 5,000 mosquitoes in one night (not the Virginia big-eared, mind you). Bats can carry rabies, but 99% of all ra-

bies infections in humans come from dogs. Do not be afraid of bats! Bats are our friends. If you are a caver, please do not disturb or harass bats. For more information we encourage you to check out NatureServe (www.natureserve.org) or Bat Conservation International (www.batcon.org).



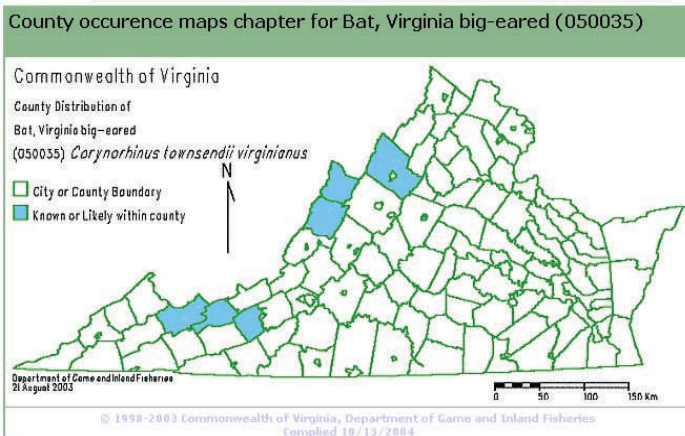
Photo credit: Bat Conservation International

Legislation

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future of the rule as the legal process plays out. Legislation to codify the 2001 rule is the best way to guarantee permanent protection of these critical areas.

Please take the time to call or write members of Congress and let them know they should support both of these bills (see our website for a sample letter). And please thank the legislators who already support these important bills. They need to know that citizens are paying attention!



Save the Date! November 9, 2007

Wild Virginia will be hosting its Annual Party the evening of November 9th. Mark your calendars and plan to attend! Details will be coming soon. As always, we will have an entertaining informal gathering to meet our members, inform folks about issues affecting our national forests, and Have Fun. We hope you will join us. Volunteers to help organize are welcome!!

Wild Virginia Position Papers on Issues Related to Our National Forests

As stated in our Winter 2007 newsletter, Wild Virginia is developing position papers on several issues that have significant implications for management of the George Washington National Forest. We are pleased to announce that two papers are complete and can now be viewed on our website, www.wildvirginia.org. The two issues are prescribed burning and wind energy. We welcome your thoughts and ideas about our positions.

We are committed to developing position papers on four more critical topics in 2007. The topics are climate change, all terrain vehicles (ATVs), logging, and mountain biking. Additional papers may be developed in the future.

WILD VIRGINIA

Protecting your favorite wild places



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