



## Revising the Forest Plan for the George Washington National Forest

Join Wild Virginia and Our Partners in Helping Shape the Future of Our Forest

By David Hannah, Conservation Director

The Forest and Rangeland Renewable Resources Planning Act of 1974 and the National Forest Management Act of 1976 require all National Forests to develop Forest Plans every ten years to guide management of each National Forest. These plans specify the types of activities that are allowed in each area of the forest. Among other things, the plans indicate where logging and off-road vehicles can occur and which areas shall be protected for various conservation and wildlife needs. The Jefferson Forest Plan revision took place between 1999 and 2003. The George Washington National Forest (GWNF) plan was last revised in 1993 and is now past due for revision.

To date, all Forest Plans have been developed subject to the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), which prescribes a process by which the cumulative impacts of the Forest Plan are analyzed in an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). Under NEPA, a set of alternative Forest Plans are developed, and public participation is required at every planning step. Largely due to politics, however, a recent environmental review by the Forest Service concluded that revising Forest Plans has no effect on the environment. As a result, the rules for forest planning have changed dramatically. The current GWNF forest plan, along with all national forests, will be exempt from NEPA. There are thus no such legal or regulatory requirements for public participation, and no EIS or set of alternative plans will be developed.

The plan will set the long-term

direction for the GWNF. Given the forest's tremendous size (roughly 1.05 million acres) and the fact it is such a unique natural resource (for example, more than 35% of the roadless area acreage in the southern Appalachian national forests – 260,000 acres - occurs within the GWNF), the stakes are



Logging on Peters Mountain, south of Covington, 1997. Jason Halbert

high.

“Categorical exclusions” from NEPA allow the Forest Service to skirt rules and avoid public scrutiny of their decisions. In October 2006, the Government Accountability Office reported the agency used exclusions on 72% of the more than 3,000 plant management projects they approved between 2003 and 2005. Now, for the first time, this is being applied to the entire GWNF Plan in addition to specific projects

within the forest.

A real concern is the potential lack of scientific input and oversight. Developing or revising Forest Plans provides the only opportunity for a big-picture view and to assess management on a forest-wide basis. Accounting for the cumulative impacts of all potential activities and management decisions simply can't be done when analyzing actions on a project by project basis. Whatever your political stripes are, Wild Virginia feels you have a right to have a say in the management of your National Forests.

You can help by attending one or many of the hastily announced (and still not posted on the Forest Service website!) public meetings on the yet to be released (as of this writing) GWNF Forest Plan.

We are working with several partners, including Virginia Forest Watch, Virginia Wilderness Committee, Southern Environmental Law Center, Heartwood, Sierra Club, The Wilderness Society, Southern Appalachian Forest Coalition, Wildlaw, and are looking for more partners in the planning process for the GWNF. As a starting point we seek:

- Protection of all inventoried Roadless Areas (keeping them as they are now, with no new roads-hunting, fishing, backpacking, birding, and more are all allowed in roadless areas)
- Protection of uninventoried roadless areas over 1,000 acres

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## Wild Virginia Update

### Letter from our new President, Eric Gilchrist

At the Wild Virginia Board retreat this past December, I was elected to serve as President of the Board. I am honored and excited to be able to lead Wild Virginia on to new objectives and goals built upon what we achieved last year. Jen Creasy, our President for the past three years, led us with energy and passion. We are grateful for her important contributions, commitment and her wonderful calm presence. The best news is that she will now lead the charge on harnessing the energy of all the volunteers that have and will come forward to help us protect our wild Virginia forests. Please contact her ASAP and let her know what you want to do to. It will be fun. You'll never regret your time spent with Jen and Wild Virginia.

I'd like to also acknowledge Jason Halbert, who served as our Treasurer for many years holding our finances together so that we had the economic resources to succeed. Nathan Van Hooser our newest board member has stepped up to the plate to take over these critical duties. Thank you Jen and Jason for all you have done and for what you are about to do!

In 2006 we had a very good year: Our all volunteer board increased from five members to seven. All the board members unselfishly

contribute a substantial amount of time and energy to Wild Virginia. I am so proud to know them. We hired David Hannah as our Conservation Director last November and it has not taken him long to get fully engaged on the forest issues. Kristin Taverna has added new capability we did not have before, GIS and map making. Under the guidance of Mike Kruse, a solid Outings Program was developed leading our members and friends into beautiful places deep inside the George Washington National Forest. The economic analysis study of the recreational value of the Shenandoah Mountain wilderness area and forests is nearly complete. The first phase results will be out this spring. Our past Conservation Director, Steve Krichbaum continues to monitor forest activities and was successful in several of his efforts last year. One of our members, Donna, has come all the way from Richmond many times to hike with us. And finally you, our members, participated with us at every step of the way and generously donated the largest amount of contributions we have ever received. Thank you all.



This year in addition to our regular activities such as forest monitoring we'll be:

- Ramping up our efforts to establish a special biological area for Cove & Paddy Runs on the Lee Ranger District
- Conducting public outreach in the Shenandoah Valley
- Drafting resolutions for Boards of Supervisors in support of roadless and Wilderness protection
- Publishing six Position Papers regarding our National Forests
- Starting "Adopt a Wilderness Area" to maintain and improve signage, trailheads and kiosks
- Hosting two events: The Tree-hugger's Ball in April, as well as our annual end-of-year party
- And by your requests, run the Outings Program through the entire year including next winter season

Please come and join us anytime. Contact me, David Hannah, or any of our board members if you ever have a question or concern. On behalf of all of us, I look forward to seeing you again or meeting you for the very first time this spring.

## Welcome David Hannah as Conservation Director!

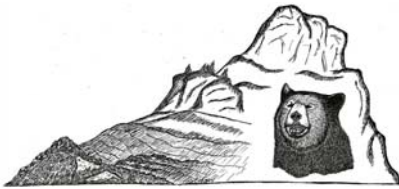
Wild Virginia is excited to welcome David Hannah as our new Conservation Director. David Hannah received his



M.S. degree in Wildlife Ecology from the University of Florida and has worked as a professional in the conservation and natural resource field since 1993. His varied career has found him working as a General Biologist with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in Delaware, a Natural Resource Manager for the North Carolina state park system, a Land Protection specialist for the Nature Conservancy of Virginia, and a Conservation Officer for the Piedmont Environmental Council in Albemarle County. In recent years, David obtained a teaching license and entered the field of education. He lives in Charlottesville with his wife Laurie and hikes in our forests at every opportunity. David is currently part-time (25 hours/week) and can be reached at our office on the downtown Mall:108 5th St. SE, Suite 206 or dhannah@wildvirginia.org, 434-971-1553. Welcome David!

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WILD VIRGINIA



Protecting Your Favorite Wild Places

David Hannah  
Conservation Director  
PO Box 1065  
Charlottesville, VA 22902  
(434) 971-1553  
<http://www.wildvirginia.org>  
[dhannah@wildvirginia.org](mailto:dhannah@wildvirginia.org)

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

## Wild Virginia Hikes and Outings

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

### Spring Hike Schedule Set: COME JOIN US!

#### Saturday, March 17 Three Ridges Summit Hike with Sierra Club-Piedmont Group

We will hike approximately 8.5 miles total from Reeds Gap to the summit of Three Ridges and back. We will gain (and then lose) about five hundred feet over Bee Mountain, then climb steadily about thirteen hundred feet to the top of Three Ridges. Sections of this hike are steep, but overall it is not a seriously strenuous hike.

If there is a lot of ice or snow on the trail, we will instead hike about 5.1 miles from Reeds Gap to the Maupin Field Shelter, then out the fire road to Love and up the Parkway to Reeds Gap. We will gain about 500 feet up Bee Mountain; the rest of the hike is very easy.

To carpool meet Jason Halbert at the usual Wild Virginia spot: 8:30am at Java Java, 2214 Ivy Road (by Sneak Reviews Video) in Charlottesville. OR 9:30am at the parking area at the intersection of the Blue Ridge Parkway and State Route 664, which is the road to the Wintergreen Ski Resort.

Bring lunch, water and appropriate clothing. Call Janet (434-263-6199) the morning of the hike if the weather is questionable. We will be home by dark.

Rain Date 3/24, same time and place.

#### April 22 (Earth Day!) Trek to Sand Spring Mountain

Spring is a great time for spying early wildflowers in bloom and catching the last ridgetop views before summer leaves crowd into a shady canopy. Our April hike should provide both opportunities with a vigorous loop hike to the summit of Sand Spring Mountain that dips back to the lower elevations of Big Run tributary.

The hike is a strenuous loop using the Sand Spring trail, Hearthstone Ridge trail, and a small section of FR101 to create an 8.5 mile circuit.

Sunday, April 22nd, meet 8:30am at Java Java, 2214 Ivy Road (by Sneak Reviews Video) in C'ville.

Bring lunch, water, field guides, and solid hiking boots. Call Nathan at 434-989-3929 for info.

#### Sunday, May 20th Little River Roadless area

Walk up onto the peak of Little Bald Knob via the Wild Oak National Scenic Trail. We may as a group set some objectives to identify and note as many as possible threatened or endangered species of flora and fauna.

Meet 8:30am at Java Java, 2214 Ivy Road (by Sneak Reviews Video) in Charlottesville.

Bring lunch, water, field guides, and solid hiking boots. Call Eric at 434-293-8039 for info.

### VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITY!

Thanks to Mike Kruse we have a great monthly hike program. We need a new volunteer to organize hikes and outings. This job does not take a lot of time and is fun! Wild Virginia has maps and trail books to help you scout new hikes and adventures. If you'd like to volunteer please call Jen or David @ 434-971-1553

## Update: Roadless Area Conservation Act of 2007

*98% of Virginians support it, but not Virgil Goode or Bob Goodlatte—Why?*

In our previous newsletter we reported on the major turning point in the campaign to protect roadless areas, when Federal Judge Elizabeth Laporte reinstated the popular Clinton-era 2001 Roadless Rule in September 2006. The original Rule provides permanent protection for 58.5 million acres of publicly owned roadless areas (forests largely unfragmented by roads), including 394,000 acres in Virginia. Judge Laporte's action effectively threw out the rule that the Bush Administration enacted to replace the 2001 rule.

Roadless leaders from both parties in the House of Representatives

are now working to take this action even further by beginning a co-sponsor drive to reintroduce the **Roadless Area Conservation Act of 2007**. Their legislation would codify the 2001 Roadless Area Conservation Rule into law. It is essential that the 2001 rule be codified into law since the administration continues to accept state petitions for exemption from the Roadless Rule under the Administrative Procedures Act (APA), thus leaving roadless areas vulnerable on a state-by-state basis.

In the 109th Congress (2005-2006), the House roadless legislation had over 140 co-sponsors. With further pressure and public input, we can continue to

build strong support for protecting our roadless wild forests in the 110th Congress. Senator John Warner is a leading champion of this legislation.

A "Dear Colleague Letter" was sent out on Friday, January 26, asking Members to co-sponsor the legislation.

**Your help is needed now. Call 202-224-3121 and ask your Representative to "become a cosponsor of the Roadless Area Conservation Act of 2007."**

To look up your Member of Congress, go to: [www.congress.org](http://www.congress.org) For a sample letter to congress visit our website: [www.wildvirginia.org](http://www.wildvirginia.org)

## Forest Planning Process - continued from page 1

- Protection of ALL 111 Division of Natural Heritage recommended special biological areas including Paddy Run
- Creation of an old-growth inventory and protection of representative old-growth forest types
- Enhanced protection for drinking watersheds within the National Forest
- Creation of Wilderness Study Areas for specific Roadless Areas (to be finalized in the coming months)
- Reduction in the annual targeted timber volume
- Recovery and reintroduction plans for extirpated species such as the fisher and the American Chestnut
- More trails and better trailheads with better maps!

What do **YOU** want to see on **YOUR** National Forest?

The first meetings are as follows:

Warm Springs Ranger District

Monday, **March 5**, 6 – 9 pm  
Hot Springs Presbyterian Church  
7433 Sam Snead Highway  
Hot Springs, VA 24445

Glenwood/Pedlar Ranger District

Tuesday, **March 6**, 6 – 9 pm  
Rockbridge High School  
143 Greenhouse Road  
Lexington, VA 24450

Lee Ranger District

Wednesday, **March 7**, 7 – 10 pm  
National Guard Armory  
451 Hoover Road  
Woodstock, VA 22664

James River Ranger District

Thursday, **March 8**, 6 – 9 pm  
Alleghany County Gov't. Complex  
9212 Winterberry Ave.  
Covington, VA 24426

North River Ranger District

Saturday, **March 10**, 1 – 4 pm  
Rockingham County Gov't. Building  
20 E. Gay Street  
Harrisonburg, VA 22802

We have a lot of work ahead of us if we are to help protect our favorite places. To stay abreast of the planning process and progress, or to obtain information about officials to contact, visit our website ([www.wildvirginia.org](http://www.wildvirginia.org)) or contact our new Conservation Director, David Hannah, at 434-971-1553 or [dhannah@wildvirginia.org](mailto:dhannah@wildvirginia.org)

### WE NEED YOU!

We're seeking volunteers for the following important tasks. Call Jen to help at 434-971-1553

- Outings/Hikes Coordinator
- Help with the Treehugger's Ball April 13th
- Help with the fall annual party
- Help create a display for events
- Timber sale monitoring/wildlife tracking
- Help drafting Position Papers

## Species Spotlight : Fisher (*Martes pennanti pennanti*)

Jason Halbert, wannabe naturalist

"Fishers prefer dense forest in large wilderness areas. This species is vulnerable to wanton and accidental killing, trapping, and habitat destruction." So states Charles O. Handley, Jr., mammologist, in the 1991 *Virginia's Endangered Species* book.

Mr. Handley passed away in the summer of 2000 and I never had the honor of knowing him. He contributed a lot to conservation of mammals worldwide. He continued his sentiments above by stating,

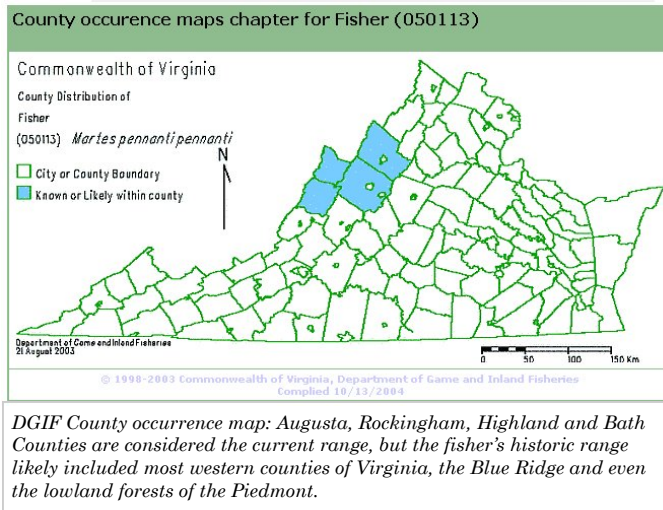
"...the most urgent need is for a widespread and persistent educational campaign to make the fisher familiar to everyone in western Virginia in order to replace useless killing with conservation. Then there is the need for coordinating forest management planning to simultaneously benefit all of the endangered boreal fauna—water shrew, snowshoe hare, northern flying squirrel, rock vole, and fisher. This is a difficult but not impossible goal."

Yet to this day there is basically no effort to regain a viable and reproducing fisher population in Virginia. Why?

Perhaps because, "Fishers prefer habitat with extensive, continuous canopy. Dense, lowland forests and spruce-fir forests with high canopy closure are often most preferred. Fishers avoid forests with little overhead cover and open areas." (Powell, 1981).

In a word, wilderness. Such habitat best exists in the National Forests, but the Forest Service does not take the fisher into account when planning timber sales or wildlife clearings.

Fishers were, and still are, highly prized for their pelts. Trappers may still get over \$100 for a good pelt in the fur trade. Trapping is legal in Virginia and West Virginia. By 1900, fishers had been trapped or logged out of Appalachia. A reintroduction program in the 1970's brought them back to West Virginia where they seem to be steady, but not increasing in numbers.



Despite fossil records as far south as the Bankhead National Forest in Alabama, the fisher's current southern range probably only extends into West Virginia with occasional sightings in Virginia's westernmost counties.

Fishers don't fish. They eat carrion (mostly deer), rabbits, voles, squirrels, mice, rats, birds, and other small animals. They will also forage. They are best known for their unique ability to kill porcupine, another Virginia native largely missing from our wildlife heritage and landscape. According to Powell and other researchers, fishers have the size and tree climbing ability to attack a porcupine's face from above until the animal succumbs. There are no quills on the porcupine's face.

Fishers are solitary animals except when mating and they require fairly large home ranges of 10-40 km<sup>2</sup> (Powell 1981; Terwilliger 1991). They are the size of a small fox and the males are larger than the females (dimorphism). Average length of males in an Adiron-



Fisher (*Martes pennanti*), photo from San Diego Zoological Garden. (Nowak 1991)

dack study was 908mm or roughly 3 ft. from nose to tail and they have lived as long as 10 years in the wild.

Like so many of Virginia's extirpated species (mountain lion and timber wolf to name two), the fisher has little to no hope of recovering its Virginia homeland unless we help. The best way to find fishers is to live trap them or track them in the snow. If you know of anyone who has a keen interest in fishers—perhaps a budding grad student looking for a project, or even a trapper who wants to see the population rebound—please contact Wild Virginia. We think fishers deserve a place in Virginia's mountains. We think the wilderness is missing one of its creations.

### References

- Powell, R. A., A. *Martes pennanti*, 1981, Mammalian Species No. 156, 6, Am. Soc. Mammal.
- Handley, Charles O. in Terwilliger, K.T., 1991, *Virginia's Endangered Species: Proceedings of a symposium*. Coordinated by the Virginia Dept. of Game and Inland Fisheries, Nongame and Endangered Species Program, pp.595-597. McDonald and Woodward., Blacksburg, VA.

### POSITION PAPERS IN PROCESS:

The Board of Wild Virginia is committed to drafting position papers on the following critical topics concerning Virginia's National Forests in 2007:

- Prescribed burning
- Wind power
- Climate change
- Logging
- ATVs
- Mountain Biking

watch [www.wildvirginia.org](http://www.wildvirginia.org)



Photo by Crees Van Gernerden

Come celebrate Thomas Jefferson's 264<sup>th</sup>  
Birthday at the

## ***TREEHUGGER'S BALL***

Friday, the 13<sup>th</sup> of April

at the Old Live Arts Space

609 East Market St. in Charlottesville  
(across from the Police Station)

**ALL ARE WELCOME!**

Music by the *Wrinkle Neck Mules* And *The Corn Hog Association*

A Raffle, Silent Auction and "FunRaiser" for

Wild Virginia and the Living Education Center for Ecology and the Arts

Call 434-971-1647 for more information

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