



WILD VIRGINIA

Protecting your favorite wild places

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Summary of the Great Little Timber Sale Lee Ranger District, George Washington National Forest April 2007

Background. Wild Virginia and other groups submitted comments to the Forest Service in 2005, after a Scoping Notice for the proposed Great Little Timber Sale was released. In December 2006, the Forest Service released an Environmental Assessment (EA) for the project. Wild Virginia submitted comments on the EA during the 30 day comment period. In January 2007, Lee District Ranger James Smalls issued a Decision Notice and Finding of No Significant Impact for the timber sale. Wild Virginia, Virginia Forest Watch, and the Virginia Chapter of the Sierra Club jointly appealed the decision (see “Selected Comments from the Appeal” below).

Basic Information. The project area is roughly 6.5 miles west and slightly north of Woodstock. It is approximately 2,804 acres in size. Twelve cutting units totaling 280 acres were identified for harvest. The decision called for: (1.) 280 acres of modified shelterwood logging and (2.) an undisclosed amount of logging road, skid trail and other logging infrastructure construction, and other activities.

Resolution of the Appeal. When the Forest Service decided in January, 2007 to proceed with the timber sale, Wild Virginia joined Virginia Forest Watch and the Sierra Club-Virginia Chapter in appealing the decision. An on-site meeting was held with Forest Service staff on April 11, followed by a conference phone call on April 13. Lee District Ranger James Smalls agreed to drop one of the cutting units (approximately 21 acres in size), which eliminated the need for roughly 2000 feet of temporary road construction. He also agreed to extra measures (planting native tree species in addition to grass, creating extra earthen mounds) when closing another temporary road at project completion. These measures will minimize erosion and illegal access on the road.

Though the appeal was resolved based on the changes to the project, we were not completely satisfied with the results. Some of our requests (e.g., dropping more cutting units, wider buffer zones along streams) were not granted. Continuing with the appeal contained some risks though, since the project as originally designed could have been reinstated. We will continue to monitor projects on the George Washington National Forest and appeal them when necessary.

Selected Comments from the Appeal.

- In general, a project of this size located in or near the Big Schloss Roadless Area, Big Schloss Special Biological Area, and several prominent peaks creates concern. Big Schloss Roadless Area was dramatically reduced in size in recent years, and protecting this area should be a management priority.
- Two of the stands (5, 6) are entirely within the watershed of the Woodstock Reservoir. Portions of Stand 6 are steeply sloped, and in very close proximity to Little Stony Creek and the reservoir. Potential impacts of roads, logging, etc. on the reservoir, or water quality in this and other watersheds, have not been discussed.



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- Several other stands have areas of steep slope.
- The entire project area is highly visible from the Big Schloss Roadless Area, the top of Big Schloss, and Little Schloss (or Little Sluice) Mountain. It is very likely visible from Mill Mountain Trail (1004) and several other trails in the area.
 - There has been no analysis of the landscape scale effects of this project. No analysis of impacts beyond the boundaries of the 12 stands was conducted. (A Scoping Notice for the proposed Laurel Run/Road Timber Sale was released 2/2/07. This could result in an additional 484 acres being harvested in the area, less than one mile from Stand 1.)
 - This project will create early successional habitat (ESH). The supply and location of ESH in the area, including private lands, has not been discussed.
 - The project occurs in the known range of a number of key wildlife species. For instance, wild brook trout inhabit Little Stony Creek. The impacts of the project to trout and other aquatic species have not been discussed. Potential impacts to raptors, forest interior species, area sensitive species, amphibians, and other wildlife groups have not been discussed.
 - Other key wildlife species may occur in the project area, and should be considered. These include the wood turtle, cerulean warbler, Indiana bat.

Questions not addressed in EA:

- Do caves, karst areas, or sensitive limestone-based soils occur here?
- Do potential old growth areas or large, old trees occur here?
- Will non-native and invasive species benefit from this project?
- Has the possibility of cultural resources in the project area been considered?