

Forests for the Future:

A CITIZENS' VISION FOR THE GEORGE WASHINGTON NATIONAL FOREST





This year, the U.S. Forest Service has begun the process of revising the long-range plan for managing the George Washington National Forest — 1.1 million acres of mountain forests stretching from Winchester to Alleghany and Amherst counties. The plan will dictate what happens on virtually every acre of the “GW” national forest for the next 10 to 15 years, decisions that will have a lasting impact on the land for generations to come.

THIS IS A RARE OPPORTUNITY FOR CITIZENS TO SPEAK UP FOR HOW WE WANT OUR PUBLIC LANDS TO BE MANAGED. RECENT CHANGES IN FEDERAL RULES MAKE THE FOREST SERVICE LESS ACCOUNTABLE FOR ITS ACTIONS AND LIMIT FULL CONSIDERATION OF ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS AND MANAGEMENT ALTERNATIVES. NOW MORE THAN EVER, YOUR PARTICIPATION IS VITAL TO ENSURE WE WORK IN COLLABORATION WITH THE AGENCY FOR A BALANCED PLAN.

NOW MORE THAN EVER, YOUR

The GW harbors many natural and cultural resources often not available or protected on private lands, including clean water for fishing and drinking, wildlife habitat for game and non-game species, maturing native forests, backcountry recreation, scenic views, and much more. In fact, the GW and other Southern Appalachian national forests were created expressly to restore and maintain healthy watersheds. Unfortunately, in the past, the agency has too often focused on logging and roadbuilding over these other values, resulting in an unhealthy forest. The time has come to restore balance.

Fortunately, citizens are increasingly placing greater value on our public lands for outdoor activities and nature tourism, wilderness experiences, and environmental protection of natural resources as we seek to leave a legacy of forest stewardship for our children’s children.

A coalition of conservation groups has set forth a Citizens’ Vision for the GW that lays out a common-sense approach for protecting our national forest, calling upon the revised management plan to:

- Emphasize backcountry recreation such as hiking, camping, bird-watching, horseback riding, mountain biking, hunting and fishing.

- Ensure that all watersheds, sources of clean water and native brook trout streams are fully protected.
- Fully protect all “inventoried” roadless areas as petitioned by the Governor of Virginia. Identify and fully protect all other remaining roadless tracts.
- Fully protect all areas identified in the forthcoming publication “Virginia’s Mountain Treasures: The Unprotected Wildlands of the George Washington National Forest.” These areas provide the last, best places for outstanding recreation in the backcountry, and intact habitat for migratory songbirds, black bear and other wildlife.
- Respond to the threat of climate change by restoring and protecting wildlife migration corridors.
- Fully protect all existing old growth and maintain sizeable uncut buffers and natural linkages around these areas.
- Fully protect all areas recommended by the Virginia Division of Natural Heritage for designation as Special Biological Areas. Also thoroughly survey West Virginia lands of the GW for special sites.



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INVOLVEMENT IS VITALLY IMPORTANT!

- Fully protect all rare, threatened and endangered species listed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Virginia Division of Natural Heritage.
- Fully protect and buffer rare and sensitive habitat conditions such as springs, seeps, rocky slopes and outcrops, steep slopes, sensitive soils, so-called “low productivity sites,” and rare forest types.
- Create recovery and reintroduction plans for native species no longer found on the GW, for example, potentially the blight-resistant American chestnut when fully developed. Take vigorous action to protect native species on the GW, particularly hemlocks which are at serious risk from the woolly adelgid, an invasive pest.
- Halt below-cost logging that loses millions of American taxpayers’ dollars.
- Identify and recommend all areas that qualify for Wilderness Study Area and Wild & Scenic River designation.
- Management objectives should be guided by “A Citizens’ Call for Ecological Restoration: Forest Restoration Principles and Criteria” (*Ecological Restoration*, Vol. 21, No.1, 2003).
- Address the encroachment of non-native invasive species. Restore remote interior forests to help stop the influx of invasive species by closing unneeded roads that cannot be properly maintained and that act as corridors for many of these invasive species.
- Only when absolutely necessary, use logging to open cleared, shrubby areas used by certain wildlife, and locate any such areas, called “early successional habitat,” close to existing roads and existing open areas on private or public lands to lessen the impacts of forest fragmentation across the landscape. If early successional forest must be maintained for some species, then re-cut sites that have been recently logged.
- Avoid using “prescribed” burns in moist areas and other areas where they are not appropriate, and allow lightning ignitions to burn in a contained manner.
- Fully recognize the vital role lightning ignitions and other natural disturbances play in promoting biological diversity and new growth and maintaining forest health.



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While the future of the GW is considered, we ask for a “good faith” voluntary moratorium on all logging and roadbuilding (except when needed for human safety and rare, threatened or endangered species) in areas identified in “Virginia’s Mountain Treasures,” existing old growth, and areas recommended by the Virginia Division

of Natural Heritage for designation as Special Biological Areas for the duration of the GW plan revision process. Otherwise, the forest conditions will be a “moving target,” where continued roadbuilding, logging and other projects would effectively preempt opportunities within the planning process.

FOR MORE INFORMATION ON THE GW PLANNING PROCESS, MEETINGS, AND DOCUMENTS: http://www.fs.fed.us/r8/gwj/projects_plans/index.shtml

For a copy of the Citizens’ Vision: www.Virginia.SierraClub.org or www.WildVirginia.org