



WILD VIRGINIA

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Summary of the Proposed Marshall Run Timber Sale North River Ranger District, George Washington National Forest February, 2008

In August 2007, the U.S. Forest Service issued a Scoping Notice for the proposed Marshall Run Timber Sale. The project area is approximately three miles west of Fulks Run in Rockingham County. The proposal calls for logging a total of 185 acres in nine cutting units, using the modified shelterwood method. Due to the inaccessibility of portions of the project area, helicopters would be used for logging three of the units. Construction of approximately 1.4 miles of new road (extending Forest Road 235A) would be necessary, as well as construction of approximately 1 mile of temporary road. A prescribed burn covering roughly 1,300 acres is also proposed.

Unfortunately, the project jeopardizes an important roadless area in the George Washington National Forest (GWNF). The project area lies within the 17,000 plus acre Beech Lick Knob area. The Marshall Run area is beautiful, remote, and scenic. As part of Beech Lick Knob, the entire area represents a rare resource in the eastern U.S., a large block of mature, non-fragmented, relatively undisturbed forest. Though Beech Lick Knob has not formally been identified as a roadless area, this proposal helped bring its omission to the attention of the Forest Service. Wild Virginia and other organizations intend to make sure it is formally designated as a roadless area when forest planning for the GWNF resumes.

Many residents of the small community of Yankeetown and the surrounding area responded immediately to news of the project. Over the years, they have witnessed increased runoff and erosion following nearby timber sales and the road construction that accompanied them. Flooding of Marshall Run is also a danger. Some residents were unable to reach their homes by car for many months following a 1996 flood. Local reactions to the project were printed in the Harrisonburg *Daily News Record* on September 28, 2007 (www.dnronline.com/news_details.php?AID=12484&CHID=1).

In addition to local citizens, Wild Virginia and several other conservation groups submitted comments on the proposed timber sale. Through emails and other means, many people were informed of the project and submitted comments as well. Hundreds of letters, emails and phone calls were received by the Forest Service.

There are many reasons why Wild Virginia opposes this sale. First and foremost, nothing should be done to jeopardize Beech Lick Knob being officially designated a roadless area. The criteria for roadless areas require minimal amounts of road and other human disturbance, including logging. No disturbance should be allowed prior to the area being evaluated for roadless area designation and other potential protections. A number of other issues need to be addressed:

- Some of the cutting units approach the Forest Service definition of “old growth.” A review of these units should be conducted as well as a thorough survey for old growth in the area. Allowing units to mature into old growth should be considered.



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- Marshall Run and its tributary Root Run are home to brook trout (*Salvelinus fontinalis*), the only native trout species in Virginia. Great care should be exercised to keep these trout waters clean and habitable.
- Two invasive species, Japanese stilt grass (*Microstegium vimineum*) and tree-of-heaven (*Ailanthus altissima*) occur on the site. Other invasive plants could be present. A rigorous plan for dealing with the potential spread of these species should be developed.
- The scoping notice for this project was short on substance and detail. There was not enough information to assess the prescribed burn of 1,300 acres.

A site visit took place on October 30, 2007. District Ranger Elwood Burge and Timber Management Assistant to the Ranger, Mark Healey, met and talked with some interested individuals and groups, walking through portions of the project area. The group included concerned local residents and representatives from Wild Virginia, Virginia Wilderness Committee, Southern Environmental Law Center, and Friends of the North Fork Shenandoah River.

No project decisions were made during the site visit. It will likely be many months before a next step is taken. We hope the Forest Service will decide to drop the Marshall Run Timber Sale from consideration, as we and many other groups and individuals recommended. Should they decide not to drop the sale, an Environmental Assessment (EA) of the proposed project should be developed, complete with a set of alternatives to the original proposal. The EA and its alternatives should be available for public review and comment before a decision about the project is made.