



P.O. Box 1065
Charlottesville, VA 22902
(434) 971-1553
www.wildvirginia.org

A Summary of Big Run Project April, 2009

The Big Run Project was proposed by the U.S. Forest Service in August, 2006. The project area is in northwestern Augusta County in the Hearthstone Lake area of the George Washington National Forest (GWNF). A combination of timber harvest and thinning was proposed for 352 acres in 15 cutting units.

Almost two thirds of the project area lies west of Tilghman Road, in close proximity to the Little River Roadless Area. Based on comments from the mountain biking community, minor changes were made to the project in areas east of Tilghman Road. In November 2007, the Forest Service announced their decision to proceed with the project. Virginia Forest Watch appealed the decision, but no substantive changes were made to the project.

To date, the project has not been implemented. During the course of revising the Forest Plan for the GWNF, the 30,227 acre Little River Potential Wilderness Area (PWA) was identified. It is larger than the Little River Roadless Area, and includes the section of the Big Run project area lying west of Tilghman Road. In late 2008, staff from the Forest Service confirmed at public Forest Plan meetings that a portion of Little River PWA will likely be recommended for wilderness consideration in the revised Forest Plan.

Due to potential impacts to Little River PWA, a revised Environmental Assessment (EA) for the Big Run Project was issued by the Forest Service in February 2009. A total of 315 acres in 13 cutting units are to be harvested or thinned. Wild Virginia, Heartwood, Virginia Forest Watch, and the Sierra Club collectively submitted comments on the project and revised EA in March 2009. Other organizations submitted comments also.

Among the major points in our comments are:

- The portion of the project west of Tilghman Road should be dropped. The project would significantly impact the many primitive qualities of the area, and could thus negatively affect future decisions regarding wilderness designation.
- Given that part of Little River PWA is likely to be recommended for wilderness consideration in the revised Forest Plan, no decision to implement any part of the project should be made until the Forest Plan is finalized and adopted.
- All of the Little River PWA meets the criteria for “roadless area” and should therefore be managed consistently with the 2001 Roadless Area Conservation Rule.
- The project area is within the North River watershed, a source of drinking water for the communities of Harrisonburg and Bridgewater. Erosion and sedimentation from existing roads are a threat to water quality, and implementing this project would increase the threat.