



More Wilderness in the Jefferson National Forest !

The Virginia Ridge and Valley Act Finally Comes to Fruition

On March 30, President Barack Obama signed the Omnibus Public Lands Management Act of 2009 (H.R. 146), approved by Congress only days earlier. This was very good news for Virginians, as the long awaited Virginia Ridge and Valley Act was part of the legislation.

It took many years of effort by numerous groups and individuals to bring about this victory. Former Senator John Warner and Representative Rick Boucher have long championed the legislation. Wild Virginia has supported the Ridge and Valley Act from the beginning. We appreciate the hard work of many of our conservation partners, including Virginia Wilderness Committee, Virginia Forest Watch, Southern Environmental Law Center, and The Wilderness Society, in shepherding the bill into law.

Roughly 53,000 additional acres in the Jefferson

National Forest have now been permanently protected. Six new Wilderness Areas, one Wilderness Study Area, and additions to six existing Wilderness Areas encompass a total of 43,000 acres (see full list below). Another 10,000 acres are in two newly created National Scenic Areas.

The act included 170 different bills

that designate Wilderness Areas and Wild & Scenic Rivers in many states. More than 2 million acres of Wilderness were created nationally. The law also created the 26-million acre National Landscape Conservation System, which will protect the most environmentally and historically-significant lands controlled by the Bureau of Land Management.



Rowland Creek Falls in the newly created Seng Mountain National Scenic Area. Photo courtesy of Virginia Forest Watch.

President Obama was pleased to sign the legislation. At the signing ceremony he stated, "This legislation guarantees that we will not take our forests, rivers, oceans, national parks, monuments, and wilderness areas for granted, but rather we will set them aside and guard their sanctity for everyone to share. That's something all Americans can support." These are welcome words from a U.S. President, the sort of which we have not heard in many years.

Newly Designated Areas in the Virginia Ridge and Valley Act

New Wilderness Areas:

- Brush Mountain – 4,794 acres (Montgomery County). Though near Blacksburg, it has remained remote due to its rugged, steep terrain and contains possible old-growth forest.
- Brush Mountain East – 3,769 acres (Craig County). Borders the Appalachian Trail (AT) for several miles, offering some great views as it ascends & descends the mountain.
- Hunting Camp Creek – 8,470 acres (Bland County). Also accessible by the AT, there are several good trout streams and many wonderful views here.
- Garden Mountain – 3,291 acres (Bland County). Adjacent to Beartown Wilderness, this area borders the well known Burkes Garden. Good hiking trails, trout streams, and old-growth forest are found here. Continued pg.2

Wild Virginia Update

Letter from our President, Nathan VanHooser

I am happy to report that the results of our Water Study continue to influence on-the-ground action. Since our last newsletter, seven more organizations have issued resolutions urging action by the USFS to step up their planning and concern for sources of drinking water degradation within the GWNF. These groups include Staunton City Council, Augusta County Board of Supervisors (BOS), Amherst County BOS, and Amherst Town Council. Our Conservation Director, David Hannah, continues to work with groups in the region to increase public concern for how forest management directly affects our drinking water.

It seems every week as I scan the travel sections of national newspapers, a pitch is made for the undeveloped beauty of some far off island. Invariably, the place is green, isolated, and has few paved roads. That ideal isn't far from what we seek in the wilder areas of our own Virginia back yard. As development continues, the value to the public of

undeveloped roadless lands does nothing but increase. In the cover article, we celebrate the new Wilderness Areas of the Jefferson National Forest. The article, 'Little River Roadless Area – A Gem of the GWNF', on page 4 highlights the significance of the largest inventoried roadless area in Virginia. While we are thankful that Wilderness Areas have lasting protection, we continue to need your help to keep the roadless areas of the GWNF green and roadless.

One important action you can take right now is to contact the Forest Service to provide comments on the Forest Plan Revision. Our website, www.wildvirginia.org, has contact information and highlights how the Plan Revision should focus on better management of our drinking water resources. The document, "Forests for the Future", provides information and talking points on many other Forest Plan issues and is at: www.forestsforthefuture.org. Please send in your comments today!

For more information on the Forest Plan Revision and general information on the GWNF, visit the useful links below:

US Forest Service explanation of their current Forest Plan Revision: <http://www.fs.fed.us/r8/gwj/forestplan/revision/index.shtm>

A listing of proposed Forest Service actions on the GWNF by month or quarter: <http://www.fs.fed.us/sopa/forest-level.php?110808>. This listing is for both the Jefferson and George Washington NF's. You will need to scan by district to focus on the GWNF actions (districts are Lee, North River, Warm Springs, James River, and Glenwood/Pedlar).

Appeals by Wild Virginia to specific proposals are at: www.wildvirginia.org/?page_id=11

The easiest way to use this list is by clicking the links from the online version of this newsletter. Apologies to those brave enough to shun a computer in your home!

Newly Designated Areas in the Virginia Ridge and Valley Act (continued from pg. 1)

New Wilderness Areas:

- Raccoon Branch – 4,223 acres (Smyth County). Part of Mt. Rogers National Recreation Area, rich forest and several trails with outstanding views make this area a favorite of horseback riders and many others. It is near the Hurricane and Raccoon Branch campgrounds.
- Stone Mountain – 3,270 acres (Lee County). Located farther west than the other areas, it is probably the least disturbed. The remote and rugged features serve as home to several rare species of wildlife.

New Wilderness Study Area:

- Lynn Camp Creek – 3,226 acres in Bland County. This area is very popular with hunters and anglers, and contains possible old-growth forest.

New National Scenic Areas:

- Bear Creek – 5,503 acres in Smyth County. Hikers, horseback riders, and mountain bikers all enjoy this remote site. The AT providing access to a portion of the area. Old-growth stands occur here also.
- Seng Mountain – 6,455 acres in Smyth County. Adjacent to Hurricane Campground and Skulls Gap Picnic Area, many people enjoy this site. The beautiful 45-foot Rowlands Creek Falls are found here.

Existing Wilderness Areas to which land was added: Shawvers Run, Mountain Lake, Peters Mountain, Kimberling Creek, Lewis Fork, and Little Wilson Creek.

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

Board of Directors

Nathan VanHooser —President
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NEW UPDATE on DONATIONS:

Wild Virginia is now an independent 501(c)3 non-profit organization. We are no longer a partner of VOP. Please make checks payable to Wild Virginia and mail to PO Box 1065, Charlottesville, VA 22902. All donations are tax deductible to the extent of IRS law.

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Wild Virginia Hikes and Outings

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

A Full Outings Calendar : COME JOIN US!

Saturday, June 27 Riprap Hollow Hike & Swim

Riprap Hollow is in the southern section of Shenandoah National Park. The spring-fed stream in Cold Spring and Riprap Hollow is very scenic and has a 50 ft. wide swimming hole fed by yet another mountain spring.

The swimming hole is a one mile hike from the trailhead. Hikers wishing to continue will hike up the mountainside another two miles and then back for a nice swim. Bring water shoes, bathing attire and lunch.

Meet at the Crimora store on Route 340 at the crossroads with Crimora Road at 11 am on Saturday, June 27. From Charlottesville take I-64 West to exit 96 and turn right on Route 340. The Crimora store is about 5 miles north of Waynesboro.

If you wish to carpool from C'ville, meet at Shenandoah Joe's new location at 2214 Ivy Road (near Sneak Reviews) at 10 am.

Contact: Cynthia Hurst at 540-447-6823 or Cynthia@ButterfliesInProgress.com



Wild Virginia members exploring a pond during the March 2009 hike on Wolf Ridge and Sand Springs Trails.

Camping Weekend July 17-19 Laurel Fork, Highland County

A candidate for Wilderness designation, Laurel Fork is a 10,000 acre section of the GWNF and one of Virginia's Mountain Treasures. The area contains old growth and at least 25 species of flora and fauna that are ranked rare by the VA Division of Natural Heritage. Elevations range from 2700 to over 4000 feet so pine is the dominate tree species. There are 28 miles of hiking trails throughout the area and a primitive camping area at Locust Springs.

Due to the driving distance, this area does not work well as a day hike destination. We have instead planned a fun weekend outing. The Adirondack Shelter, located at the Locust Spring Picnic area, can be used for camping. There is a hand operated water pump, picnic tables, fire rings and a vault toilet in the area around the Shelter. A \$2.00/day parking fee is in effect.

July 17: Arrive at Locust Springs Picnic Area. Bring your own camping gear, food and ice. There are no stores nearby.

July 18: Hike and explore the area. A variety of options are available depending on the group.

July 19: Hiking and/or travel home.

From Staunton VA, take U.S. 250 west through Monterey into West Virginia to its intersection with West Virginia Route 28. Turn North (right) on Rt. 28 and proceed about 6 miles to FDR 106 and the signs for the Locust Springs Recreation Area. Follow the signs for parking access.

To sign up please contact: Chris Bowlen at 540-289-6801 or bowlenchris@comcast.net

The Little River Roadless Area — A Gem of the GWNF

At 27,292 acres, Little River is not only the largest inventoried roadless area in Virginia; it is the largest roadless area along a wide stretch of the Appalachian Mountains. If you add in the adjacent uninventoried areas, Little River weighs in at more than 30,000 acres. You would have to travel north all the way to New Hampshire or south to Georgia to find a larger, intact roadless area.

Little River lies along the eastern slope of Shenandoah Mountain, 10 miles west of Bridgewater. It is bounded on the north by Briery Branch Road, by Tilghman Road and Hearthstone Lake to the east, by Todd Lake on the south, and by the crest of Shenandoah Mountain to the west. It contains the headwaters of both Little River and North River, providing drinking water for Harrisonburg, Bridgewater and Staunton before joining the rest of the Shenandoah River watershed. It contains the two largest Natural Heritage conservation sites in the GWNF with a diversity of natural communities and rare species, including the Cow Knob Salamander (*Plethodon punctatus*), the endemic millipede, Shenandoah Mountain Xystodermid (*Nannaria shenandoah*) and the globally-rare variety of Least Trillium (*Trillium pusillum* var. *monticulum*).

Shenandoah Mountain is also known for its high elevation old growth and for breeding populations of disjunct northern birds such as the Red Crossbill (*Loxia curvirostra*), which has a circumpolar range, as well as others that breed at high elevations on the Allegheny Mountains and on Whitetop and Mt. Rogers (Mueller, R; Forests of the Central Appalachians, <http://asecular.com/forests/reddish.htm>).

Trails used by hikers, horseback riders and mountain bikers generally run east-west and rise nearly 2800 feet to 4350 ft at Reddish Knob, the highest point in the George Washington National Forest. Reddish Knob was the site chosen by President Clinton as a setting to sign the historic 2001 Roadless Area Conservation Rule, protecting Little River and over 58 million acres in National Forests from most logging and road building.

Our April hike was along the headwaters of the North River, north to the top of Shenandoah Mountain. The Buck Mountain Trail reaches Buck



Little River Roadless Area as viewed from Reddish Knob, March 2009.

Mountain at 3,660 ft, where spectacular views of surrounding knobs are spread out in a 180 degree vista. The panorama of unbroken forest is a reminder of what the primitive Appalachians were like. To the east, deciduous oak forests stretch towards Briery Branch and Bridgewater with spectacular views of Briery Branch Reservoir and Hearthstone Lake.

We have targeted the Little River Area with the majority of our spring hikes for both recreational and conservation reasons. Shenandoah Mountain is the object of intense conservation efforts by a broad coalition of forest protection, mountain biking, and hunting groups. Wild Virginia has asked the Forest Service to designate all of the 115,000 roadless acres of the Shenandoah Mountain Complex as “wilderness study areas”, which would

protect the unique biodiversity and remote characteristics.

The importance of this area is unfortunately not obvious to everyone. A 315 acre timber sale, The Big Run Project, is moving forward with roughly 200 acres of cutting proposed within the eastern edge of Little River. Wild Virginia has hiked and surveyed the area and asked the Forest Service to spare these lands within Little River. The project would significantly impact many primitive qualities of the area, and could thus negatively affect future decisions regarding wilderness designation.

In addition, 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 “temporary” roads are a continual threat to water quality and reopening them to logging trucks and the erosion that accompanies logging would increase the potential negative impact.

TAKE ACTION: Write or call Forest Supervisor Maureen Hyzer (www.fs.fed.us/r8/gwj/contact/index.shtml). Request that the portion of the **Big Run Project** within Little River Potential Wilderness Area **be dropped**. Ask that **all of the 115,000 roadless acres** of the Shenandoah Mountain complex, especially Little River, be protected as wilderness study areas.

It is also important to send a copy of your letters to your congressman and Senators Warner and Webb. They need to know that you support protecting this unique and special area. The phone numbers and addresses of your federal elected officials are available on line on their individual websites or at www.visi.com/juan/congress/.

Species Spotlight: Non-native Invasive Plants

by Jennifer Johnson, from article by The Plant Conservation Alliance, Alien Plant Working Group

Invasive plant species are a widespread problem in our national forests. The Shenandoah Chapter of the Virginia Native Plant Society has been conducting plant surveys in the North River Ranger District of GWNF annually since 2004. They have identified many common invasive exotic plant species in the GWNF.

Tree-of-Heaven

(*Ailanthus altissima*) Also known as Ailanthus, Chinese sumac, and stinking sumac, tree-of-heaven is a rapidly growing, deciduous tree that can reach a height of 80 feet or more. It has yellow-green flowers that appear in late spring and some say it smells like peanuts or cashews. It is easily mistaken for native sumacs, and trees, like ash, black walnut and pecan. It produces many seeds and can easily overrun native plants. It also produces toxins that prevent the establishment of other plant species. Tree-of-heaven was first introduced to America by a gardener in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania in 1784, and by the Chinese who came to California during the goldrush of the mid-1800s.

Russian Olive

(*Elaeagnus angustifolia*) This thorny shrub or small tree can grow up to 30 feet tall and has a dense covering of silvery scales. Its leaves are egg-shaped, and it has fragrant, yellow flowers that appear in June and July, which are eventually replaced by clusters of silvery fruits. The Russian olive interferes with native plants by disrupting natural plant succession and nutrient cycling, as well as taxing water reserves. It was first cultivated in Germany in 1736, and was introduced in the U.S. in the late 1800s. Until recently, the U.S. Soil Conservation Service recommended Rus-

sian olive for wildlife planting and windbreaks.

Japanese stilt grass

(*Microstegium vimineum*) Sometimes called "Nepalese browntop," this annual grass can grow to heights of 3½ feet. It is especially well adapted to low light conditions and forms extensive patches. White-tail deer may facilitate its inva-



Japanese stilt grass carpeting the forest floor. Photo by John M. Randall, The Nature Conservancy, Bugwood.org.

sion by feeding on native plant species and avoiding stilt grass. It was first documented in Tennessee around 1919, and may have escaped as a result of its use as a packing material for porcelain.

Garlic Mustard

(*Alliaria petiolata*) This biennial herb smells like garlic when crushed. Their small white flowers, which have four petals in the shape of a cross, appear in spring. It competes with native plants by monopolizing light, moisture, nutrients, soil and space, which deprives resources from wildlife species that depend on native plants for their foliage, pollen, nectar, fruits, seeds and roots. It can be mistaken for native plants that also have white flowers, like toothworts, sweet cicely, and early saxifrage. This affects insect species like the West Virginia white butterfly, which primarily eats toothworts as a caterpillar. Garlic mustard was probably introduced by settlers in Long Island, New

York around the mid-1800s.

Oriental bittersweet

(*Celastrus orbiculatus*) This perennial climbing vine and trailing shrub has been known to grow stems as thick as four inches in diameter. Females produce clusters of small greenish flowers. Their abundant fruits make Oriental bittersweet extremely popular for use in floral arrangements. It can be confused with native American bittersweet, which is becoming less common. American bittersweet has fewer, larger clusters of fruits whereas Oriental bittersweet has many fruit clusters emerging along the stem. Hybrids can occur which may make identification more difficult. It was introduced in the mid-1800s as an ornamental plant and quickly escaped into natural areas. It is still planted and maintained, promoting its spread.

Japanese Honeysuckle

(*Lonicera japonica*) This vine climbs up the trunks of shrubs and small trees. Its flowers are fragrant white or pink tubes. In the southern U.S., it often remains evergreen, which gives it an added advantage over native species. It can also girdle young trees by twisting tightly around their trunks. Introduced to the U.S. in the early to mid-1800's as an ornamental plant, for erosion control and wildlife cover, the honey-flavored nectar is often eaten by children.

Of these species, Japanese stilt grass and garlic mustard seem to be the most prevalent in the area of the GWNF surveyed. For more information, see the source of this article: The Plant Conservation Alliance, Alien Plant Working Group: <http://www.nps.gov/plants/alien/index.htm>.



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P.O. Box 1065
Charlottesville, VA 22902
www.wildvirginia.org