

Resolution -
Drinking Water Management in the George Washington National Forest

WHEREAS, the U.S. Forest Service is in the process of revising its 1993 Land and Resource Management Plan for the George Washington National Forest.

WHEREAS, the provision of clean safe drinking water is one of the primary benefits that the George Washington National Forest provides to the communities that surround it.

WHEREAS, the U.S. Forest Service's agency-wide Strategic Plan for 2004 – 2008 seeks to achieve six goals, including "Improve watershed condition."

WHEREAS, approximately 44 percent of the Virginia lands in the George Washington National Forest are within watersheds that provide public drinking water to more than 260,000 residents of western Virginia in 22 communities surrounding the national forest by means of reservoirs and surface waters.

WHEREAS, drinking water sources from within the George Washington National Forest serve an estimated 82,723 residents in the five county service area of the Central Shenandoah Planning District Commission.

WHEREAS, degraded water quality in the George Washington National Forest has been documented in the 2006 Water Quality Assessment report by the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality, which identified fifty (50) streams and six (6) reservoirs within the national forest that are impaired.

WHEREAS, four (4) of the six (6) reservoirs within the national forest that are impaired occur within the service area of the Central Shenandoah Planning District Commission, including Switzer Lake, Staunton Reservoir, Elkhorn Lake, and Middle Lake Moomaw.

WHEREAS, Switzer Lake serves the City of Harrisonburg and some residents of Rockingham County, the Staunton Reservoir serves the City of Staunton and some Augusta County residents, and Elkhorn Lake occurs within the watershed of the Staunton Reservoir.

WHEREAS, the greatest threats to water quality within the George Washington National Forest are ground disturbing activities, such as timber harvesting and road construction, which result in erosion and sedimentation.

WHEREAS, more than one third of land in the drinking watersheds is considered suitable for timber production under the 1993 George Washington National Forest Management Plan, roughly the same percentage of land considered suitable for timber production in areas outside the drinking watersheds

WHEREAS, the 1993 George Washington National Forest Management Plan identifies drinking water reservoirs, but does not address the watersheds that surround these reservoirs or offer distinct management objectives to maintain or improve drinking water quality in these watersheds by controlling erosion and sedimentation.

WHEREAS, the 1993 George Washington National Forest Management Plan does not identify rivers, streams and their surrounding watersheds that serve as drinking water sources for the region nor does the plan offer distinct management objectives to maintain or improve drinking water quality in these watersheds by controlling erosion and sedimentation.

WHEREAS, the 1993 George Washington National Forest Management Plan addresses riparian areas (narrow corridors bordering rivers and streams) and narrow areas bordering reservoirs, but does not provide management objectives for lands within the larger watersheds that determine the health of the water resources in these streams and rivers.

WHEREAS, a 2008 report by the National Research Council (part of The National Academies) states that a sustainable supply of clean water is the most important product or commodity produced by our forests.

WHEREAS, good management of drinking watersheds will provide benefits beyond producing clean drinking water, such as improving habitat for brook trout and other aquatic species.

NOW, THEREFORE, be it resolved that the undersigned hereby support the following revisions to the George Washington National Forest Management Plan to ensure the quality and quantity of drinking water sources within the national forest boundaries:

- The U.S. Forest Service shall formally identify all the drinking watersheds serving reservoir and surface water resources within the George Washington National Forest.
- The U.S. Forest Service shall establish management objectives that encompass the health of entire drinking watersheds, in order to ensure that conditions within the watersheds will maintain, protect and enhance drinking water quality.
- The U.S. Forest Service shall gather more information to describe and assess watershed conditions, develop a plan to systematically monitor water resource programs and obtain all data pertinent to water quality and watershed conditions, in cooperation with other agencies, organizations, local communities and volunteers.
- The U.S. Forest Service shall seek to communicate more effectively with the localities that obtain drinking water from sources within the George Washington National Forest in order to ensure that the drinking watersheds are managed effectively, appropriately and for the public good.
- The U.S. Forest Service shall work with local communities, agencies and the larger public to establish policies and develop management plans for the drinking watersheds to permanently maintain, protect and enhance drinking water quality.

Adopted by:

Signature:

Date:

Central Shenandoah PDC
[Signature]
3/16/09