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## The Forest Plan for the George Washington National Forest March, 2010

The Forest Plan for the George Washington National Forest (GWNF) is currently being revised. The process has been initiated twice before, only to have federal courts rule that revisions to the planning regulations made by the Bush administration violated federal law. Resumption of forest planning in March 2010, for the third time, will use the original 1982 planning regulations.

The US Forest Service is accepting public comments on the Forest Plan. The GWNF website (<http://www.fs.fed.us/r8/gwj/forestplan/revision/index.shtml>) provides information about the planning process. Forest Service documents pertinent to the Forest Plan are downloadable there.

**Forest Plans** dictate how national forests are managed for **10 to 15 years at a time**, so it is extremely important that citizens make their opinions known about how the GWNF should be managed. The current GWNF plan was finalized in 1993.

**Comments** about the Plan via letters, emails, phone calls and faxes **are critical**. Comments should be sent to the George Washington-Jefferson National Forests Headquarters in Roanoke, Virginia. **Please contact** the US Forest Service:

Mailing address: Maureen Hyzer, Forest Supervisor  
George Washington National Forest  
5162 Valleypointe Parkway  
Roanoke, VA 24019-3050

Email address: **comments-southern-georgewashington-jefferson@fs.fed.us**  
(Please write "Comment on George Washington Plan Revision" in the subject line of your post.)

Phone numbers: (888) 265-0019                      Fax numbers: (540) 265-5145  
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Visit our website, [www.wildvirginia.org](http://www.wildvirginia.org), and download a copy of "**Forests for the Future**", a citizens' vision for the George Washington National Forest. This short report lists priorities for managing the GWNF that were developed by a group of eight conservation groups.

## Some Points to Consider Using in Your Comments

Watersheds providing drinking water to local communities should be fully protected.

- These local drinking watersheds comprise approximately 44% of GWNF lands in Virginia
- 22 local communities and more than 262,000 residents get some or all of their drinking water from lands within the GWNF. This does not include large, downstream localities like Richmond or Washington, DC, which also obtain drinking water from lands within the GWNF.
- These lands are currently not managed any differently than other GWNF lands. In fact, they are not even identified under the existing (1993) forest plan.
- More than one third of the land within these drinking watersheds is considered suitable for timber production under the existing (1993) forest plan.
- Entire watersheds must be managed, not just riparian areas.
- Brook trout and other aquatic species will benefit from full protection of these watersheds.
- 50 rivers and 6 reservoirs in the GWNF are “impaired” according to a 2006 assessment by Virginia Department of Environmental Quality. These waters and the lands surrounding them need special attention. Disturbances (such as timber sales, new roads, etc.) should not be permitted near them.

Create Special Biological Areas or other designations to protect rare species, natural communities, and geological formations or landforms.

- Protect all sites (more than 100!) recommended by the Virginia Division of Natural Heritage.
- Create a Special Biological Area to protect the wood turtle population.

All roadless areas, both inventoried and newly identified ones, should be managed according to the 2001 Roadless Area Conservation Rule.

The Forest Service has identified 37 sites and approximately 372,000 acres of Potential Wilderness Areas. At present though, only 4 sites and approximately 27,000 acres will be recommended for wilderness consideration.

- Much more area and many more sites should be recommended for wilderness consideration. Some of the sites include Laurel Fork, Oak Knob-Hone Quarry, Gum Run, Beech Lick Knob, Big Schloss, Kelley Mountain and more!
- Some areas should be considered for National Scenic Area and National Recreation Area designation.

Protect all old growth forest.

- Maintain uncut buffers around old growth areas.
- Allow some areas of mature forest to develop into old growth.
- Develop a comprehensive survey of old growth and “near” old growth areas.
- Create a network of old growth areas in the forest, with linkages.

Take climate change into account in the new Forest Plan.

- Restore and protect wildlife movement corridors.
- Make ecological restoration of the forest a priority, to increase the resiliency of the forest to climate change and other disturbances.