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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

New Website Helps Citizens Protect National Forests from Fracking

Citizen groups debuted a new website today that will educate the public about the impacts of oil and gas drilling and hydraulic fracturing on National Forests in the eastern U.S. and provide them with tools to evaluate and challenge drilling and fracking proposals. Days after the Obama Administration released a new proposal for rules governing hydraulic fracturing on public lands that were widely criticized as too weak to protect public health and the environment, the new website was introduced to serve as hub for citizens who want to learn more about fracking in National Forests and connect with others working to protect their local forests. The new website, *A Guide to Keep Fracking from Damaging our Eastern National Forests* is available at <http://www.saveblackwater.org/gasdrilling/index.html>.

In 2011, the West Virginia group Friends of Blackwater (“FOB”) spearheaded formation of the Eastern National Forests Oil & Gas Working Group. The ENF Working Group provides a venue for environmental groups concerned about natural gas drilling and hydraulic fracturing on Eastern national forests to learn about and discuss these issues, to educate one another, their members and the public, and to seek enhanced protections for these forests.” The new website Guide for citizens and citizen groups concerned about the health of their Forests is a product of the Group’s collaboration.

The on-line Guide explains what tools are available when gas drilling proposals come to a local Forest. The website highlights case studies from National Forests in Pennsylvania, Ohio, West Virginia, Virginia, Arkansas, and Alabama. These case studies show a growing movement

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of citizen advocates dedicated to protecting the woods, watersheds and wildlife of our public lands. The site also has links to related websites, reports, and fact sheets -- with information on endangered species, drinking water, and National Forests state by state.

Ernie Reed of Wild Virginia is excited about the new tool, “The information on the website would have taken years for a local group to obtain or implement through research and experience. It makes clear there is an inadequate review for making decisions about drilling on our national forests and is of immediate value to anyone battling the consequences of fracking in their communities and in their region.”

The online Guide was inspired by a guide for Western Forests, created by Earthworks and the Land and Water Fund of the Rockies, called “Preserving Our Public Lands, a Citizens’ Guide to Understanding and Participating in Oil and Gas Decisions Affecting Our Public Lands.” The Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC) and the Allegheny Defense Project created maps used in the new Guide.

Groups participating in the Working Group are Friends of Blackwater, West Virginia Trout Unlimited, Virginia Forest Watch, Allegheny Defense Project, Southern Environmental Law Center, Heartwood, the Buckeye Forest Council, American Rivers (DC & PA), the Natural Resources Defense Council, Wild Virginia, the Center for Biological Diversity, Arkansas Sierra Club and the Ouachita Forest Watch. FOB coordinates the Working Group. Major support for this work came from the Colcom Foundation.

See the Guide at <http://www.saveblackwater.org/gasdrilling/index.html>

Fracking is a significant threat to watersheds and ecosystems in the George Washington National Forest. Wild Virginia wants to see the moratorium on fracking, that was in the draft version of the forest plan, maintained or strengthened in the new forest plan due out this summer.

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