



For Immediate Release

**George Washington Forest Plan:
A New Mix of Protection and Extraction**

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After more than seven years of stop-and-go progress, the George Washington National Forest finally has a new Forest Plan to guide management for the next 10-15 years. The result is a peculiar mix that affords greater protection to many parts of the forest and increased logging and management of the rest.

“It is clear that the US Forest Service has listened and responded to the most emphatic concerns of the public on all sides,” said Misty Boos, Wild Virginia’s Managing Director. “The result is a mixed bag where the scales will tilt back and forth as projects are developed.”

The Plan makes a vast portion the forest, over 1,100,000 acres or 83% of the forest unavailable for oil and gas drilling. Only existing leases and private mineral rights will be able to be developed. This is in response to an overwhelming outcry statewide to ban fracking in the forest. “This means we will have to fight leases and projects one at a time,” said Boos.

“We are pleased with the potential for increased wilderness,” said Boos. The Forest Service has recognized the importance of increasing 4 existing wilderness areas by a total of 12,000 acres and of adding 15,200 acres in Little River and Beech Lick Knob. It also has recommended creating a 90,000 Shenandoah Mountain National Scenic Area.

The Plan poses obvious challenges for conservation in the forest. “The new Forest Plan throws open the doors for removing up to 8.75 million tons of ‘uncommercial timber’ for biomass burning that serves no public benefit,” said Ernie Reed, Wild Virginia’s President.

“But the big loser is the endangered Indiana Bat,” Reed added, “who will lose up to 23,000 acres of potential habitat as the number of acres suitable for timber production increases to over 450,000 acres.” Indiana Bat populations have been decimated in Virginia in the past decade due to white-nose syndrome. “The Plan is likely to have its own impacts on the decreasing bat population in Virginia.”

The Plan will also take its toll on potential wilderness areas in the forest. “Almost 100,000 acres of potential wilderness will be delegated to other levels of management that will degrade its wilderness character and prevent these areas from ever becoming wilderness,” said Reed.

But, Boos noted “the biggest imminent threat to the forest is not any aspect of the Forest Plan but the potential Atlantic Coast Pipeline that lies outside the scope of the Plan. The pipeline would slice through the southern part of Shenandoah Mountain and render some of the more positive aspects of the Plan moot.”

“It now becomes even more important to stop the pipeline and to monitor projects in the forest that the Plan may allow, to assess their potential impacts and to advocate for appropriate conservation measures on the ground,” said Reed. “On the ground and in the forest is where targeted forest protection is most needed.”

Wild Virginia is a grassroots, non-profit organization dedicated to preserving wild forest ecosystems in Virginia’s national forests through education and advocacy. For more information, contact info@wildvirginia.org or visit www.wildvirginia.org.

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