



## Drinking Water Resources and the Forest Plan

### Results from the Wild Virginia study of drinking water resources in the GWNF

Wild Virginia is happy to announce that our study of drinking water resources in the George Washington National Forest (GWNF) is complete! Copies of the report, in both full and summary versions, will be available in December 2008. An electronic version of the report will also be downloadable from our website.

Lying entirely within the Chesapeake Bay watershed, the GWNF forms the headwaters of the James and Potomac Rivers. Almost 4 million residents of the metropolitan areas of Richmond and Washington, DC obtain their drinking water from these rivers. Closer to home though, the GWNF is a very important water resource. More than 260,000 residents of 22 localities in western Virginia depend on the neighboring GWNF for drinking water. For some localities, the GWNF serves as their sole source of drinking water.

In addition to five reservoirs, eight rivers within the GWNF provide drinking water to local communities. For example, the Buffalo River forms in and flows from the Pedlar Ranger District. The town of Amherst withdraws water from the Buffalo River downstream of the GWNF. The Buffalo River has also been designated as a future source of drinking water for Amherst County. The watersheds of these 13 reservoirs and rivers occupy a significant portion of the national forest, approximately 44.5% of the GWNF

lands in Virginia.

Although drinking watersheds comprise a large portion of the GWNF, there is very little difference in how these areas are managed when compared with the remaining area of the forest. Under the current Forest Plan for the GWNF (completed in 1993), 34.4% of the land in the drinking watersheds is considered suitable for timber production compared to 34.8% of the land outside the drinking water-



Brown Mountain Creek, upstream of the Pedlar Reservoir in the GWNF. The Pedlar Reservoir is the primary source of drinking water for Lynchburg.

sheds. There is also no significant difference in the amount and density of roads and trails between these two areas of the forest.

Somewhat surprisingly, water quality in the GWNF is cause for concern. In its 2006 report, the VA Dept. of Environmental Quality identified 50 streams and rivers in the GWNF that are impaired. Twenty-one of them occur in drinking watersheds. Six reservoirs are also impaired. Four of the reservoirs are within drinking water-

sheds, with drinking water being directly drawn from two – the Pedlar and Staunton Reservoirs. It is important to note that none of these waters are impaired for use as a public water supply. Most impairments are due to reduced aquatic life, high levels of coliform bacteria, low levels of dissolved oxygen, or low pH (acidic conditions).

Sampling of streams for macroinvertebrates in the GWNF has been conducted by the Forest Service since the 1990's. These data show somewhat higher water quality in the five reservoir watersheds. However, there is virtually no difference in water quality between the watersheds of the eight rivers that provide public drinking water and the remaining area of the forest. Unfortunately, there is simply not enough data to make definitive assessments of water quality in the GWNF. In particular, data regarding sedimentation, which is the largest threat to water quality in national forests is lacking.

The current Forest Plan for the GWNF does very little to address drinking water resources. Only municipal reservoirs were identified in the plan, and the only protective measures are lakeside management zones adjacent to the reservoirs and riparian buffers along streams that flow into the reservoirs. The riparian buffers extend one mile upstream of the reservoirs.

## Wild Virginia Update

### Letter from our President, Eric Gilchrist

I would like to cover two topics in this newsletter with you. First, the board and I are proud of the **Water Study project** that Wild Virginia's Conservation Director, David Hannah diligently guided to completion with the help of volunteers and collaborators. Copies will be available to you before the year is out. Please see the front page article, "Drinking Water Resources and the Forest Plan", for a summary of the results and recommendations.

This water study is the first of its kind and clearly presents the case that the George Washington National Forest is an important component in a clean drinking water supply for local communities in the Shenandoah Valley and much of western Virginia. And the importance goes geographically beyond us. Friends in the Washington DC and Richmond areas are very aware that their drinking water supply is greatly affected by what happens in the headwaters. The information in this report is of interest to millions of people.

Many Americans understand the importance of protecting the last wild areas remaining in our forests but those who are not able to connect with nature have difficulty appreciating its value. Wild Virginia's Water Study, as well as other natural resource economic studies, helps people begin to understand that forests are so much more than business assets to be harvested for timber and other commodities. We urge you to read the study as soon as it is online at [www.wildvirginia.org](http://www.wildvirginia.org), disseminate key points to your friends and neighbors and provide feedback to us as to what you would like to see happen next.

Secondly, this has been quite an exciting and exhausting year for many people, topped off with a whirlwind election season. With climate change and fuel efficiency common topics in the news, we seem to be moving in the right direction. Still, we face many challenges: from the war in Iraq to the down-turned economy to health care.

There is one remedy I'd like to propose to you for your stress. Go visit the forest. If you have trouble finding time to do this, put it in your daytimer/calendar just like you would schedule a visit to your doctor or workout center. Join Wild Virginia on a hike or simply go on your own with family and friends. If you have not hiked in a while, you'll be amazed how good it feels to spend quality time in a healthy forest. Your blood pressure will go down, your heart rate will become stronger, you'll connect again with some deep emotions, you will forget your problems for a while, and you will be able to sleep much better. Above all, it is reasonably affordable and convenient. Repeat this remedy as often as you can.

**Have a great holiday season enjoying the many gifts the forest has to offer. Thank you for all your support and we hope to see you soon!**



## Potomac Appalachian Trail Club (PATC) and Wild Virginia work together in Ramsey's Draft Wilderness

On a great fall day in October, Wild Virginia joined members of the Potomac Appalachian Trail Club (PATC) to perform maintenance work on Jerry's Run Trail in Ramsey's Draft Wilderness. Fourteen eager souls dove into the task. Before day's end, all the objectives of the work leader, Mark Gatewood, were met. Five trees that were blown down across the trail were cut, step notches were made in two large trees lying across the trail, roughly 200 feet of the trail were regraded, and brush was removed from the lower section of the trail.



Jerry's Run Trail work crew at Ramsey's Draft Wilderness. Photo by Mark Gatewood.

The work was fun and challenging, as chainsaws and other mechanical equipment are not allowed in wilderness areas. Only cross cut saws and other hand tools were used. One of the absolute highlights came at the end of the day. An intrepid trail worker-yoga instructor led the group in some stretching & relaxation exercises to help us wind down. Thank you Deborah! Our tired muscles appreciated it.



Deborah Caudle and Chris Bowlen using the cross cut saw to cut a tree. Photo by Mark Gatewood.

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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!

#### Sunday, December 14th Crabtree Falls Trail

Crabtree Falls Trail in Nelson County features a series of five major cascades and a number of smaller ones that fall a total distance of 1,200 feet. The best views of the falls are in the winter and spring during high water flow. The hike is a ~5 mile loop with some strenuous up-hill sections. Wear sturdy shoes and bring plenty of water and lunch.

There is a \$3 per vehicle fee for the trail. Carpooling is encouraged! Carpool from Java Java on Ivy Road in C'ville at 9:00am or meet at the trail head at 10am. Leader: Kristin Taverna 434-923-0107. Call trip leader for cancellation information due to rain or snow.

pants, a fleece, waterproof gloves, gaiters, a change of clothes, a small backpack, a water bottle, and several snacks/energy bars. The area use fee is \$12.00 per day and skis can be rented for \$15.00.

We will depart Charlottesville at 6:30am from Java Java on Ivy Road and will most likely return to Charlottesville between 8-9pm.

If you plan to attend, you must **contact Jen Creasy prior to January 10th**, at 434.242.6630 or [jencreasy@comcast.net](mailto:jencreasy@comcast.net), to reserve your spot. In the event that conditions are not suitable for travel or skiing, the trip will be rescheduled.



#### Sunday, February 8th Hardscrabble Knob from Tearjacket Trail

A 7-mile round trip of moderate difficulty starts at 3000 ft with a gradual ascent through a chestnut-oak forest. The trail then follows several ridge lines through hemlock and maple stands to end in the northern end of Ramsey's Draft Wilderness Area. At 4,282 ft, Hardscrabble Knob affords good views of the Draft and Elliot Knob to the south. Meet at the trail head at 10 AM. Leader: Chris Bowlen 540-289-6801.

From 250 W turn right at Braley Pond. Follow SR 715 (becomes FS 96) to intersection with FS 95. Turn left on FS 95 (if the road is paved, you missed the turn). Stay on FS 95-trail head is ¼ mile past the turn for FS 85.

Carpool from Java Java on Ivy Road in C'ville leaves at 8:30 am.

#### Saturday, January 17th, 2009 Cross-country skiing in White Grass, West Virginia

Come join Wild Virginia for a cross-country ski outing to White Grass, West Virginia! Cross-country is fun, easy to learn, inexpensive, and a healthy way to spend some of your winter time. Located in a snowy corner of the Cabin Mountain range of West Virginia's High Alleghenies, White Grass maintains 50 km of trails - all ranging from 3200 ft to 4400 ft. - and has over 1,200 vertical feet to traverse!

Both beginning and advanced skiers are encouraged to join us! Temperatures in Canaan Valley can often hover in the teens during the day. Please be sure to bring the appropriate clothing (no cotton!). The following items are suggested: two pairs of wool socks, a warm hat, thermal underwear, a waterproof ski jacket, waterproof ski

## National Forest Plans Ignore Endangered Species

In August, the Forest Service issued a directive stating that consultation with the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service regarding threatened and endangered species is not necessary when developing or revising Forest Plans. Additionally, guidance in the Forest Service Manual on sensitive species is no longer applicable. The directive results from the most recent (of many) changes to the forest planning regulations that have been made under the Bush administration. The current regulations have been challenged by two different sets of conservation groups in federal appeals court. Decisions on one or both challenges could come at any time.

The logic behind the Forest Service directive is basic: Forest Plans, by themselves, “may have no effects on listed species or designated critical habitat under the Endangered Species Act (ESA).” In other words, plans are only plans, not on-the-ground activities that can impact sensitive or listed species. Wild Virginia and many other organizations strongly disagree with this notion, finding it overly simplistic and disingenuous. There are many ways in which Forest Plans are an action under the ESA, as they do have effects on species. For example, plans identify areas that are suitable or unsuitable for timber production and harvest, establish timber production targets, identify potential transportation routes, and adopt standards or guide-

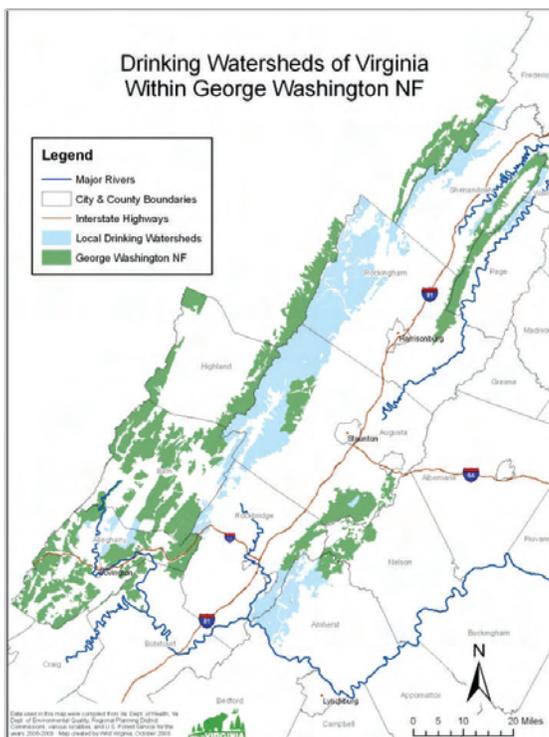
lines for managing natural resources (e.g., water quality).

There are many other examples of how plans can affect individual wildlife species. At a larger scale, a Forest Plan (as opposed to project by project analysis) is the only opportunity to assess cumulative effects and other potential impacts to species on a forest-wide scale. Wild Virginia joined thirteen other organizations in September to submit comments opposing this directive. We will keep you informed about the ongoing and dynamic circumstances surrounding forest planning regulations, as they will impact the Forest Plan revision for the GWNF. As always, stay tuned!

## Drinking Water Resources and the Forest Plan (continued from pg. 1)

More attention to and protection of water quality in the GWNF is direly needed. Below are a few of our recommendations to the Forest Service (see final report for full list):

- The revised Forest Plan should formally identify all the drinking watersheds lying within the GWNF. The rivers and streams within these watersheds should be considered a public water supply.
- Forest management should address entire watersheds, not just riparian areas. Specific management objectives should be developed for all drinking watersheds.
- Impaired streams, reservoirs, and their watersheds need special attention and should be a priority for restoration efforts. Ground disturbing activities (i.e. logging & road building) should not be conducted near streams that are impaired or subject to other physical stresses.



efforts with other agencies, organizations, and local communities.

- The Forest Service should increase its own efforts to monitor water quality in the GWNF. Particular attention should be paid to sedimentation in streams and rivers. Direct measures of the impact that ground disturbing activities and projects have on water quality and sedimentation are needed.

Improving existing water quality while permanently protecting future quality are obvious goals with which to begin. The potential impacts of timber harvesting and road construction (including temporary roads) must be fully examined (see Roads article on page 5).

With the Forest Plan currently being revised, now is the time to ensure the next plan explicitly addresses public drinking water resources. **Please contact the Forest Service** and tell them how you would like to see water quality addressed. Instructions on how to submit comments can be found at the bottom of page 5. Thank you for making your voice heard!

- More information is necessary to assess watershed conditions. The Forest Service should utilize data available in existing water quality programs and obtain all data pertinent to water quality and watershed conditions. There is great potential for cooperative

## The Problem with Roads in the George Washington National Forest

Most people think of roads in our National Forests as a way to get around and see the forest and for access for logging, hunting or camping. As a result, the George Washington National Forest has steadily increased the number and length of roads, much to the detriment of the forest's quality.

Roads and the activities that they promote are the largest source of erosion, sedimentation of streams, and nonpoint source pollution in the forest. They increase the volume and speed of water runoff, carving out and carrying away soil, then depositing it in streambeds when the flow gradually slows. But besides having the greatest potential for degrading water quality, roads do more damage to the integrity of the forest than you might ever imagine.

Roads do more than allow the most nefarious activities of humans in almost every part of the forest. Roads carve the forest into smaller islands which lose their ability to sustain many native species. *Fragmentation* by roads restricts the natural range of numerous species and creates barriers to movement of flora and fauna. In times of changing climate they prevent many species from being able to move through the forest, creating "death traps" for many species with small ranges such as reptiles and amphibians.

The effects of roads are not limited to the surface area of the road alone. The removal of vegetation, the opening of the forest canopy, the compaction and erosion of the roadbeds and the eventual and easy intrusion of opportunistic, invasive exotic species, create *edge effects* that stretch from the road itself, deeper towards the more interior areas of the forest.

Roads were the topic of recent

fall meetings for the George Washington National Forest staff, rangers and the public in Lexington and in Woodstock. Our Virginia forests are overbuilt with roads. There are more than 4000 miles of roads within the George Washington National Forest, although no one knows the real figure. We do know that if all the roads in the GWNF were placed end-to-end, they would stretch westward from here to Hawaii.



Logging road to Hematite timber sale in the George Washington National Forest.

We do know that 80% of the forest lies within a ½ mile of a road and the road density approaches 3 miles per square mile of forest. Those of us who study the forest also know that the rarest and most special lands in the GWNF are those which are roadless and which could be considered potential wilderness areas.

With the increased knowledge we have about the problems of roads and the increased cost of construction and maintenance, it makes absolute sense to make road closures and restoration an objective for the new George Wash-

ington Forest Plan. Wild Virginia suggests that priorities for permanent road closings should be highest in:

- Drinking water watersheds and watersheds containing populations of native brook trout.
- Areas with roads that cross permanent, culverted or ephemeral streams.
- VA Department of Natural Natural Heritage Special Biological Sites of rare diversity.
- Areas which could qualify for Roadless or Potential Wilderness designation if road density were decreased.
- Spur roads and "roads to nowhere" that are vectors for invasives into more interior forest areas and which have a high incidence of illegal off road and all-terrain 4-wheel use.
- Areas with "troads" which are part of the foot trail, bicycle and horse system but continue to be managed as if they are roads.

Every square inch of the GWNF is open to those of us willing to get out of our cars and off of our wheeled machines. And for those of us who find convenience important and appreciate places that are easy to get to, there are still thousands of miles of roads to enjoy. As the planning process continues for the new GW Forest Plan, (see Summer 2008's Ancient Mountain Sentinel) it is important to let the planners know what *you* think about roads and trails in the forest. E-mail Forest Supervisor Maureen Hyzer at [comments-southern-georgewashington-jefferson@fs.fed.us](mailto:comments-southern-georgewashington-jefferson@fs.fed.us) or write her at George Washington Plan Revision, GWJNF, 5162 Valleypointe Parkway, Roanoke, VA 24019.

## **SAVE THE DATE! EARTH DAY 2009**



**Saturday, April 18th, 2009**

### **Wild Virginia Earth Day Celebration & the 4th Annual Treehugger's Ball!**

**Come celebrate Earth Day 2009 with Wild Virginia! We know it is still months away, but we are planning ahead for what is sure to be a fantastic party. Wild Virginia is going to combine two great events – the Treehugger's Ball and our annual members party – into one grand Earth Day celebration. You don't want to miss all the fun in 2009. Save the Date!**



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