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### **Wild Virginia Releases *The State of Our Water* and Recommends Watershed Protection In the George Washington National Forest**

Twenty-two localities in western Virginia obtain at least a portion of their drinking water, directly or indirectly, from surface waters of the George Washington National Forest (GWNF). In addition, almost 4 million residents downstream obtain drinking water from the James and Potomac Rivers, fed by rivers and streams that flow from the George Washington National Forest. The Virginia Department of Environmental Quality in 2006 found a large presence of impaired waters within the GWNF. And the GW Forest Plan has no special protection of these areas that would safeguard water supplies in the long term.

These are some of the findings contained in *The State of Our Water: Managing and Protecting the Drinking Water Resources of the George Washington National Forest*. In this report, released today by *Wild Virginia*, the important role of the George Washington National Forest as a local and regional source of drinking water is examined. Now, for the first time, critical watershed information is combined in one place which can lead to better protection of Virginia's water resources.

The George Washington National Forest covers over 1 million acres of predominately forested land in Virginia and West Virginia. The GWNF spreads across thirteen Virginia counties, including Nelson, Amherst, Augusta, Rockingham, Shenandoah, Page, Warren, Frederick, Highland, Bath, Botetourt, Rockbridge and Allegheny Counties. Over 44% of the forest drains directly into drinking water supplies of Staunton, Harrisonburg, Lynchburg, Clifton Forge, Winchester, Strasburg, Woodstock, Broadway, Front Royal, Bridgewater, Lexington, Covington and the Town of Amherst. Twenty-two localities in western Virginia obtain at least a portion of their drinking water, directly or indirectly, from surface waters of the GWNF.

*The State of Our Water* provides detailed information and analysis and makes additional recommendations to maintain and protect these drinking water resources for western Virginia communities and for cities and towns downstream in the James and Potomac River watersheds including the greater metropolitan areas of Richmond and Washington, D.C.

“Because drinking water is so important to communities in the Shenandoah Valley and beyond, Wild Virginia calls on the Forest Service to revise the current Forest Plan to delineate specifically and increase protection for drinking watersheds in the George Washington National Forest,” said David Hannah, Wild Virginia's Conservation Director and author of the report.

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So many communities, public officials and organizations, like *Wild Virginia*, are taking bold steps to remedy this. For example, on December 10, Rockingham County Board of Supervisors passed a resolution asking the GWNF's Forest Plan be revised to include stronger protection of its drinking water watersheds.

([www.rockinghamcountyva.gov/webimages/121008packet.pdf](http://www.rockinghamcountyva.gov/webimages/121008packet.pdf) pg. 29-31) The Town of Dayton (also in Rockingham) passed a similar resolution on December 8, while the City of Harrisonburg passed one on Nov. 25. The three local governments represent approximately 48,750 residents who get their drinking water from GW National Forest sources.

“With the publishing of this report, with the forest plan currently being revised and given the rising costs of water treatment and infrastructure, now is the ideal time to assess and develop measures to assure good water quality,” added Hannah.

*Wild Virginia* is a grassroots non-profit organization dedicated to preserving wild forest ecosystems in Virginia's National Forests. For more information on *Wild Virginia*, see [www.wildvirginia.org](http://www.wildvirginia.org), or contact David Hannah Wild Virginia Conservation Director and author of the report at 434-971-1553.

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